

**transcripts:1**

The background of the entire image is a vibrant, abstract composition of paint splatters in red, blue, yellow, and black on a white base. In the center, the back of a person with short, wavy blonde hair is visible. They are wearing a white shirt with a bold, colorful pattern of red, blue, black, and purple. Overlaid on the lower right of the person's back is a red, multi-pointed star-like shape. Inside this red shape, the words "global art forum" are written in white, lowercase, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. Below the red shape, centered on the person's back, is a white geometric logo consisting of four interlocking hexagons arranged in a larger hexagonal pattern.

**global  
art  
forum**













# First Annual Global Art Forum

## With the support of

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*Alireza Sami Azar*, Curator, Writer, Former Director of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran

*Jerome Sans*, Director of Programmes, Baltic, Gateshead, United Kingdom  
*Tirdad Zolghadr*, Curator, Zurich, Switzerland

*Kamran Diba*, Founder, Tehran Museum, Architect, Collector, Art Adviser, France and Spain

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# Global Art Forum Putting Dubai at the centre of the Global Art World

Maria Finders

It is said that Dubai is the most global of the global cities, and thus was the perfect setting for a new three-day discussion platform: the *First Annual Global Art Forum*. The Forum, hosted by the DIFC Gulf Art Fair, brought together an international group of over forty artists, curators, dealers, museum directors, critics and academics for three days to focus on issues affecting art and the arts community with the consideration of the Middle East as a driving force.

Bringing an open forum to an art fair is a complex balancing act, as the commercial aspects of an art market often challenge the positions of artists, curators and exhibition makers. The Global Art Forum hopes to reconcile these diverse perspectives and map out the constellation of ideas and opinions defining art today and in the future.

The central themes of this year's Forum will be Artists and Their Work, The Next Ten Years of Contemporary Art in the Middle East and Cities and Culture.

Artists, while being protagonists of the art community, often shy away from the trappings of the commercial art market that often sustains their production. With the Artists and Their Work discussions, the Global Art Forum hopes to initiate a discussion wherein artists can be at the centre of the conversation and not just its topic. Thus, in the launch year of the fair, we have invited curators to interview artists from around the world, showing their work and talking about their practice and vision.

The Next Ten Years of Contemporary Art in the Middle East focused on major transformations that are happening in the region, which have and will have significant global ramifications. Artists, art professionals and institutions throughout the Middle East will face many of the issues that challenge art institutions around the globe, such as public vs. private funding, control systems, freedom of expression, societies



and/or governments, and the negotiation between artistic innovation and audience expectations. If societies are to survive into the next century on a more constructive note, it is imperative that they begin to understand how these changes are affecting cultural cartographies and artistic production as they address broader concerns from history, memory and even spirituality.

Culture is increasingly becoming an economic driver. Some call it the “Bilbao effect”, but this is only one of the most recent examples of how cities use culture to create environments for their citizens and to claim a unique position in the global economy. The “post-industrial” economy is a “cultural” economy – with the very understanding of culture itself being appropriated by the enlarged provision of (and longing for) meaningful “experience”. There is a clear epochal shift from the perspective of planning urban development and the integrated model of the creative city and how it impacts the lives and working conditions of city dwellers.

The Cities and Culture Forum will involve cultural leaders from London, Paris, New York, Mumbai, Zurich, Berlin and Dubai sharing their ideas about how to consider the establishment and development of the “Art City”. The influence of architecture, design, urban planning and technology will also be examined.

We would like to thank all the speakers of the First Global Art Forum in Dubai for their brilliant contributions to making this event memorable for all of us.

Maria Finders  
First Global Art Forum  
Curator, Director, Europe,  
Brunswick Arts

## Speakers' biographies

### Andreas Angelidakis

#### Architect, Athens, Greece.

Andreas Angelidakis is an architect working at the intersection of digital culture and architectural production. Operating for almost nine years, Angelidakis has realized projects in Sweden, Switzerland, USA and Italy as well as various online communities such as Active Worlds, Adobe Atmosphere and Second Life, often moving elements from one world to the other, mixing real with virtual objects in the casual contemporary way that a teenager uploads pictures on myspace. His clients often include cultural foundations, artists, collectors of contemporary art and online friends. Apart from architectural commissions he has collaborated on artistic projects, contributes regularly to diverse publications such as Textfield, Vogue Italia and Purple together with his own active blog, as well as teaching, travelling and writing. His work takes the form of buildings, pavilions, computer animations on DVD, and 3-D prints, theoretical texts and virtual temporary structures in the Sandboxes of Second Life.

*More info on [www.angelidakis.com](http://www.angelidakis.com)*

### Savita Apte

#### Curator, Writer, Head of Education, DIFC Gulf Art Fair, Mumbai, India.

Savita Apte is an independent art historian and commentator on Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art. She has been mentoring

promising artists and guiding their development since 1991. In 1995 she joined Sotheby's as consultant expert for Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art for their auctions in London and New York. She is on the advisory board of Sovereign Art Foundation and advises various institutions as well as select private collectors. She lectures at SOAS, Sotheby's Institute and the British Museum. She is currently a PhD candidate at SOAS, University of London and is a founding partner of the creative consultancy, Asal and a director of the DIFC Gulf Art Fair.

### Charles Asprey

#### Curator And Collector, Charles Asprey Award for Palestinian Art, London, England.

Charles Asprey (born 1971) has been collecting for 16 years and has been a gallery owner, publisher and curator during this time. He continues to collect and advise on young collections and is the co-founder and director of ArtSchool Palestine. From 1995 until 1997 Charles Co-Founded Ridinghouse Editions London; from 1997 until 2005, he was Co-Founder of AspreyJacques Gallery London. Today, Charles is Co-Founder of ArtSchool Palestine ([www.artschoolpalestine.com](http://www.artschoolpalestine.com)) and a partner of the Contemporary Art Forum (CAF) a registered charity. In 2006, Charles curated the "As if by Magic" exhibition at The Bethlehem Peace Centre Bethlehem, West Bank, Palestine.

In 2007 the ArtSchool Palestine will present In Focus, an exhibition of Middle Eastern film to be shown at Tate Modern, London and The Imperial War Museum, London.

### Kader Attia

#### Artist, Paris, France.

Born in Dugny in 1970 and raised in Garges-les-Gonesses/Sarcelles, Abdelkader Franck Attia has always been told, "If the fascists come to power, you'll be the first to be kicked out". Muslim, Christian and Jewish, his name reflects his identity – or rather, his identities.

Brought up in the cosmopolitan suburbs of Paris, at the age of 11 he began working in the stalls of Sarcelles Market where he learned to observe everything around him. Unlike this buzzing hive of activity, he found secondary school a bore. But, Attia found escape from the dreary classroom by drawing on his notebooks. After seeing his perfect reproductions of cigarette packets, his art teacher took him to an open day at the Arts Appliqués de Paris. Attia instantly saw how his dreams could take shape here.

After graduating from the Duperré Art School (1993) and a year at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts (1994), he spent two years in the Congo. Here, he was struck and inspired by the elegance and exuberance of central African sculpture, both classical and modern. He returned to Paris in 1997 and made "La Piste d'atterrissage" (The Landing Strip, 2000), a slide show about the life of Algerian transsexuals exiled in Paris while civil war raged in their home country.

Since then, his work has taken the form of installations (The Dream Machine, Venice Biennale, 2003 and The Sweat-

Shop, Art Basel, Miami 2004), video ("Shadow" Video Zone, Tel Aviv 2004) and photography ("Alter Ego", Sketch Gallery, London, 2005). His recent projects, such as "The Loop" shown at Art Basel in 2005 or "Fortune Cookies" in Canton are further illustrations of the eclecticism of his work. In Basel, he installed a circus tent in which break-dancers spin alongside a whirling dervish and a hanging DJ. In China, after buying a bankrupt Parisian Chinese restaurant at an auction in Bobigny, he sent it back to its country of origin.

With time Kader Attia's work is becoming more and more psychoanalytic. He then builds installations, questioning the viewer about his fantasies and phobias ("Sweet sweat", Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm 2006).

### Lara Baladi

#### Artist, Cairo, Egypt.

Lara Baladi works with the reproducible image in various media and formats. Born in Lebanon in 1969, of Lebanese-Egyptian origin, Baladi has lived in Beirut, Paris, London and Cairo, where she currently resides. Her work has been exhibited internationally at various spaces around the Middle East, the US, Japan and Europe, and is part of a number of contemporary art collections, including the Fondation Cartier in Paris, the Museet For Fotokunst in Copenhagen, the Audi Bank in Beirut, and most recently, the Pori Art Museum in Finland. Kairo, the artists first major solo-show, was initiated by the Bildmuseet in Sweden in October 2004 and continued its tour of art museums in Scandinavia until March 2006, including specially commissioned works and a catalogue re-edition produced by the Pori

Museum in Finland. Baladi has participated in several ongoing internationally touring exhibitions, including Africa Remix (2004-2007), I-Dentity (2005-2007) and Snap Judgments curated by Okwui Enwezor. She was commissioned to open the Image of the Middle East festival in Denmark, August 2006, with a 20 projection/screen installation along one kilometer of seashore. Baladi was selected to be one of the artists to show an installation at the first Gulf Art Fair in Dubai. Amongst other venues, her work will be exhibited at the Sharjah Biennial in 2007. She is represented both by the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, which exhibited Baladi's work at the 2006 Frieze Art Fair in London and by Brancolini & Grimaldi gallery in Italy. In December 2006, Baladi initiated and directed Fenenin El-Rahhal, an artists working summit on the subject of Territory in the Egyptian Western desert ([www.nomadicartists.com](http://www.nomadicartists.com)). Baladi received a fellowship from the Japan Foundation in 2003. She is a member of the Beirut-based Fondation Arabe pour l'Image. Since 1997 she has lived and worked in Cairo.

**Lisa Ball-Lechgar**  
**Editor, Canvas, Arts Manager,**  
**Cultural Consultant, Dubai,**  
**United Arab Emirates.**

Embedding the arts in the heart of society is something that Lisa Ball-Lechgar holds dear to her heart. The Glasgow University Fellow and MA graduate worked as an actress before moving into arts management and advocacy. After launching Scotland's first international university theatre festival with Sean Connery, she moved to Morocco where she worked in the theatre sector. The next seven years was spent at Arts & Business where

she became Head of Information and International Affairs, serving as a cultural advisor to institutions including the World Bank, European Commission and the British Government. Following a research project on the cultural sectors of Egypt and Lebanon with the European Cultural Foundation and Visiting Arts (UK), Lisa moved to Beirut in 2002 where she combined international arts consultancy, the editorships of several magazines and the management of Ashkal Alwan – The Lebanese Association of Plastic Arts. She also wrote the draft cultural framework for the Beirut Central District. She joined Mixed Media Publishing as Editor in October 2005 and is responsible for all its publications including Canvas, the premier magazine for art and culture from the Middle East and Arab world. Lisa has lectured at universities in the UK, Lebanon, Norway, Finland and France. In her spare time, she delivers arts management and CSR training and consultancy to businesses and arts organisations across South Africa.

**Saleh Barakat**  
**Art Expert, Beirut, Lebanon.**

Saleh Barakat is an art expert, based in Beirut, specialized in the contemporary art of the Arab world. He has curated several pan-Arab exhibitions (Ateliers Arabes for the IX Francophonie Summit, Arabian Canvas for the World Bank Summit). He has written many articles in his specialty in edited books as well as in learned journals, and coauthored a book on contemporary Lebanese art (commissioned by the Arab League Education, Culture and Sciences Committee). The projects he started for the preservation of XXth century art of the Arab world include the foundation of Agial (1991) and

Maqam (2006), two specialized institutions in the beginning of images in the Levant area since 1870, in addition to being a founding member of Kinda Foundation (2000), which specialises in the promotion of the contemporary Arab art in the world (with special focus on the 1950/1960 period) and the American University of Beirut Art Center (2001).

He firmly believes that creating healthy market environments for independent contemporary creative expressions is a basic step towards establishing stable progressive cultures in the Arab world. Hence his particular interest in the issue of strengthening the infrastructure of the contemporary art markets in the region, from networking and publishing to developing public auctions and other market tools necessary to build up confidence and continuity in this rising emerging art scene.

**David Barrie**  
**Director, The Art Fund,**  
**London, United Kingdom.**

David Barrie studied Experimental Psychology and Philosophy at Oxford before entering the Diplomatic Service in 1975. He served in various posts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Cabinet Office, and in the British Embassy in Dublin. He was seconded in 1989 to become Executive Director of The Japan Festival 1991, a major celebration of Japanese culture that took place throughout the UK. In 1992 he was appointed as Director of the National Art Collections Fund, a charity which helps museums enrich their collections and campaigns on behalf of museums and their visitors. An expert on Ruskin, his publications include an abridged edition of John Ruskin's Modern Painters. He is a Trustee of the Museums, Libraries and

Archives Council (MLA); the Campaign for Museums; the Ruskin Foundation; the Gulbenkian Museum of the Year Awards and Butterfly Conservation. He is also a member of the MLA's Acceptance-in-Lieu Panel.

**Daniel Birnbaum**  
**Director of The Städel Schule**  
**Art Academy and Portikus**  
**Gallery, Frankfurt, Germany.**

Daniel Birnbaum is the Director of the Städel Schule Art Academy and its Portikus Gallery, both in Frankfurt am Main. He is the founder (with Isabelle Graw) of the Institut für Kunstkritik, and a member of the board of Frankfurt's Institut für Sozialforschung. He was co-curator of the 2003 Venice Biennale and of the first Moscow Biennial in 2005. A contributing editor of Artforum in New York and an associate curator of Magasin 3 in Stockholm, he is the author of many books on art and philosophy including Production (Kiasma, 2000), a collaboration with artist Carsten Höller, and most recently Chronology (Lukas & Sternberg, 2005). He is the co-curator, together with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B Kvaran of Uncertain States of America, an exhibition of emerging American artist that has travelled to many cities, including London, Moscow and Beijing. Together with Christine Macel he is the curator of Airs de Paris that opened at the Centre Pompidou in April celebrating the institution's 30th anniversary.



## **Camilla Cañellas**

### **International Arts Writer and Associate For Art Projects And Solutions, Barcelona, Spain.**

Camilla Canella is an arts consultant with over 15 years' experience working in the cultural relations and UK arts funding sector. She has an MA in Art History from Edinburgh University with specialist knowledge of Islamic art and architecture and a particular interest in contemporary art practice across the Middle East, Central Asia and the Islamic world. She spent 12 years working for the British Council in London where she was Head of Visual, Media & Applied Arts for Visiting Arts ([www.visitingarts.org.uk](http://www.visitingarts.org.uk)) – developing international arts policy and strategy for the UK's visual arts sector and managing a grants programme. She also developed initiatives such as the Visiting Arts International Artist Fellowship Programme (setting up the Annual Visiting Arts/Delfina International Artist Fellowship and the Annual International Artist Fellowship at Spike Island, Bristol), and the Visiting Arts/Henry Moore 'Artist to Artist' International Programme. A notable initiative was the setting up of [www.artschoolpalestine.com](http://www.artschoolpalestine.com) – a project which aims to increase opportunities and develop skills for contemporary artists living and working in the Palestinian Territories.

Since leaving the British Council in 2005 to work as a freelance arts consultant she has been working on a number of projects related to the Middle East. She organised a UK curator's trip to the 7th Istanbul Biennale in September 2005 for Arts Council England (which followed an earlier trip to Lebanon and Egypt). She also worked for Bidoun in 2006

developing press and marketing strategies for the magazine in the UK. More recently she has worked for the V&A magazine on the launch of the Jameel Gallery of Islamic art; and she has worked closely with The British Museum on the 'Word into Art' exhibition – co-chairing the associated conference 'Middle East Now' and writing for the British Museum magazine on the Middle Eastern art market.

In December 2006 she completed a project for Tate Britain exploring the feasibility of developing a contemporary art project with the Middle East to complement a forthcoming exhibition they have planned in 2008. She is now working on a number of other Middle Eastern initiatives and artist/gallery projects both in the UK and Barcelona where she is now living.

## **Jan Dalley**

### **Arts Editor, The Financial Times, London, United Kingdom.**

Jan Dalley is the arts editor of the Financial Times, based in London. She has also been the literary editor of the FT, and previously the literary Editor of the Independent on Sunday. She has written extensively on books, culture and the arts, in a wide range of newspapers and periodicals. For some years she worked in publishing in London, and has acted as a judge for some of the UK's leading literary prizes, including the Booker Prize and the Whitbread Prize. Other published works include a biography of Diana Mosley (Faber, 1999) and a historical study entitled *The Black Hole: Money, Myth and Empire* (Penguin 2006), as well as translations from the French. She has three children and lives in London.

## **Beth Derbyshire**

### **Artist, London, United Kingdom.**

Since graduating from Chelsea College in 1996 with an MA, Beth Derbyshire has exhibited internationally. Most notably for East International, Norwich, Mirror at the Museum of Installation, Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery and twice as part of the New Visions programme at the National Maritime Museum. Abroad at the O to 1 video show, Brera Institute, Milan which then toured to Tokyo, Gasterbeiter at the 2YK Gallery, Berlin, the Sharjah Biennale, EV+A International Ireland (1998, 1999 and 2000), as well as part of special projects at the Brussels Art Fair (2004) and Arco, Madrid (2005). In 2005 she launched Message at the National Maritime Museum, a live public event that involved semaphoring a message across London using 37 veterans on Remembrance Day. Beth Derbyshire is an artist, choreographer and entrepreneur. She was classically trained at The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, but has diverted her more traditional skills into the realms of performance, video installation and graphic design. Her work is deeply involved with the personal and political identities of people from all walks of life, although she seems to pay particular attention to those without voice. Derbyshire expresses the concerns, actions, beauty and meaning of people who are neglected or forgotten. She has worked with deaf choirs, a silent order of Carmelite nuns, refugees, newly sworn British citizens and veterans. She aims to uncover the mode in which we communicate who we are, and what we represent. Despite the proliferation of words and voices in everyday life, they are not necessarily the best means of

distinguishing oneself from others. Derbyshire focuses on non-verbal forms of expression – the act of silence, the use of semaphore and sign. She notices the overlooked and lets their voices be heard.

## **Wim Delvoye**

### **Artist, Gand, Belgium.**

Wim Delvoye was born in 1965 in Wervik, and lives and works in Gand, Belgium. Recent solo exhibitions include: 2006: Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Miami; Scale Models & Drawings, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv; Cloaca IV, Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung, Taiwan; 2005, Scale Models & Drawings, Sperone Westwater, New York; 2004, Cloaca-New & Improved, The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada; 2003. Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon; Caterpillars, Public Art Fund Projects (Target Art in the Park), Madison Square Park and Doris Freedman Plaza (Central Park) NYC, USA; 2002; Cloaca-New and improved, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; Wim Delvoye (survey exhibition), Museum Kunst-Palast, Düsseldorf; Marble Floors, Sperone Westwater, New York; Wim Delvoye (survey exhibition), Porin Taidemuseo Finlande; Chantier (Gothic Works), Manchester City Art Galleries, Manchester; Wim Delvoye (survey exhibition), Culturgest, Portaria da R. Arco do Gego, Lisboa (15 October to 29 December); 2001, Cloaca - 'new and improved', Migros Museum, Zürich; 2000, Cement Truck, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Selected group shows include: 2006, The Complex of Respect, Kunsthalle Bern; Into Me/Out of Me, PS1 New York; 2005, Burlesques Contemporains, Jeu de Paume, Paris; Slow Art, MKP, Düsseldorf; Biennale d'Art Contemporain, Lyon; Convergence,

E116/N40, 798 Dayalo Workshop, Beijing; Two Asias/Two Europes, Duolun Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai; 2004, Giganten/Giants, Den Haag Sculptuur 2004, The Hague (NL); Fooding: Ordres et désordres de la nourriture, CAPC Bordeaux; 2003, Extra, Swiss Institute for Contemporary Art, 495 Broadway, New York; Phantom of Desire, Neue Galerie, Sackstrasse 16, Graz (Austria); De Manessier à Wim Delvoye, Musée National d'histoire et d'art, Luxembourg; Jan Hoet presenteert: Delvoye-Hammons, Les Brigittines, Korte Brigittinenstraat, Brussel; Absolut Generations, 50. Biennale Venezia – Zenobio Palace; Outlook 2003, Cultural Olympiad 2001-2004, Athens (Greece); 2002, Attachment+ (Brugge 2002), Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen, Brugge; Busan Biennial, Busan Metropolitan Art Museum, Busan, Corée: 2001, Give and Take, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

## **Kamran Diba**

### **Architect, Paris, France.**

Kamran Diba a naturalized citizen of Egypt was born in Iran in 1937 and educated in the United States. A prominent architect-town planner, he won an architectural award from the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. His work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale for Architecture and Shushtar New Town was included in the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's traveling exhibition "At the End of the Century". He has been on several international juries and has lectured widely. Diba now lives in Europe and divides his time between France and Spain.

He began as an artist and still paints. He has had several one-man exhibitions in the US and Iran and a good number of his work is in TMCA's collection.

He was the architect and founder of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. During the seventies he amassed a sizable collection of modern and contemporary art for the museum. In October 1977 he opened the museum as its first Director and was responsible for the acquisition of a major part of its collection, while often subjected to criticism from both inside and outside Iran where people did not share his vision or zeal. The Centre Pompidou had just opened when the Tehran Museum was inaugurated with international fanfare. Diba was a pioneer, in the late sixties he introduced the idea of cultural centres to Iran and managed to build a couple of them. It is noteworthy that the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art is one the rare institutions which survived the regime change in Iran and still functions as before.

He left Iran shortly before the revolution and continued his activity in the art world as advisor and collector. Diba, a resident of Spain, is active in the Paris art scene. His collection was shown in the exhibition "Passions Privées" at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and several other European museums.

## **Anita Dube**

### **Artist, New Delhi, India.**

Anita Dube was born in Lucknow (UP) in 1958. She studied History for a Bachelors degree in Delhi, and Art Criticism for her masters, at M.S. University, Baroda. Subsequently she was involved with an ultra left artists collective, the Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors association until it collapsed in 1989. She began to experiment with sculpture around this time, and came to Delhi in 1991, where she continues to live and work. She has presented her work in many group and

solo exhibitions in India since 1992, working with curators Gayatri Sinha, Peter Nagy, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Yashodhara Dalmia, Arshiya Lokhandwala and Rasna Bhushan. In 2005 her one person show "ILLEGAL" traveled from Nature Morte, Delhi, to Bose Pacia, New York. She is scheduled to show at Galerie Almine Rech, Paris, this spring.

She has exhibited her work internationally at "The Bridge: Construction in Process VI, Melbourne, in 1998; the "Seventh Havana Biennial", Cuba, in 2000; "ARS OI", curated by Maretta Jakkuri, at Kiasma, Helsinki, in 2001; "Rest in Space", curated by Steffi Goldman and Inghild Carlson for the Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, and the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin in 2002. Her work was also shown in "How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age", curated by Douglas Fogle, at the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, in 2003, traveling to the Fondazione Sanderotto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City. She participated in "The Tree from the Seed" curated by Gavin Jantjes, for the Henie Onstad Kunstcenter, Oslo, the same year. In 2004, she was curated by Keith Wallace in "Resonance: Anita Dube and Subodh Gupta" for the Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. She was part of "iCon: India Contemporary, at the Venice Biennale in 2005, as well as the "Indian Summer (la jeune scène artistique indienne), at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Anita has been a founder and active member of KHOJ, an alternative arts organization since 1997, and now serves on its board. She also occasionally writes on Contemporary Indian Art.

## **Bassam Al-Baroni**

### **Art Critic, Curator, Egypt.**

In late 2005, Bassam co-founded Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (ACAF), a collectively run artist-led space, the first in Egypt's second largest city. As a writer he has written texts on the work of many artists, including Susan Hefuna, Amina Mansour, Mona Marzouk and Karim Rashid. His writings have also appeared in a number of local and international publications such as Bidoun, A-42 Arte and Culturas, and Canvas. His recent curatorial projects include the exhibition Family – You, Me and the Trajectories of a Post-Everything Era, PROGR - Zentrum für Kulturproduktion, Bern, Switzerland (2006) and Prototypes for an Advanced Outdoor Visual Culture (2006), an art in public spaces project in Alexandria with the artist duo Winter/Hörbelt and art students from Alexandria and Frankfurt.

## **Jan Fabre**

### **Artist, Brussels, Belgium.**

Upcoming Solo exhibitions: 2007, Venice Biennale, Palazzo Benzon, curator Giacinto Pietrantonio (GAMEC, Bergamo It.) 2008, JAN FABRE in the Louvre (solo), curator Marie-Laure Bernadac (Louvre, Fr.) In 1984 Faber represented Belgium at the 41° Biennale di Venezia; in 1992 he participated in Documenta IX, Kassel, Museum Fridericianum. Among his solo museum and Kunsthalle shows are included, in 1990, Das Geräusch, Basel, Kunsthalle and Antichambres/Affinités Sélectives VI, Jan Fabre/Christian Boltanski. Brussel - Bruxelles, Paleis voor Schone Kunsten - Palais des Beaux-Arts; in 1991, Zwei Objekten. Frankfurt-am-Main, Schirn Kunsthalle; in 1995, De Lijmstokman, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum; in 1996 Passage,

Boedapest, Ludwig Muzeum, also presented in 1997 in Antwerpen at MUHKA - Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen; in 1999, Jan Fabre. Warszawa, Museum of Contemporary Art and Engel and Krieger. Strategien und Taktiken, Kiel, Kunsthalle; in 2000 A Consilience. London, Natural History Museum and Angel and Warrior. Strategy and Tactics, Marugame, MIMOCA Museum of Contemporary Art; Umbraculum. Oslo, Kunstneres Hus; 2003, Gaude succurrere vitae (Alegrate de socorrer la vida). Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró; 2004 Gaude succurrere vitae (Réjouissez-vous de venir au secours de la vie). Lyon, Musée d'Art Contemporain; 2006 Homo Faber, Antwerp, Antwerp Museum of Contemporary Art, The Royal Museum of Arts, The City Library of Antwerp, Rode Zeven, Rossaert and Lancelot, Roma, Magazzino d'Arte Moderna. Among selected group exhibitions; 1991 Metropolis, International Art Exhibition Berlin Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau; 21a Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, São Paulo, Diverse locaties; Third International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, The Greater Istanbul Municipality Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı Art Museum; 1997 La pittura fiamminga e olandese, Venezia, Palazzo Grassi; 1998, Skin, Jerusalem, The Israel Museum; 2000, 5eme Biennale d'Art contemporain de Lyon. Partage d'exotismes, Lyon, Halle Tony Garnier; 2001, 1st Biennial of Valencia. The Body and Sin, Valencia, Convento del Carmen; 7th International Istanbul Biennial. Egofugal/Egokaç. Istanbul, Diverse locaties; 2003, Outlook, Athens, Diverse locaties; 2005, Slow Art. Neue Akzenten aus Flandern und den Niederlanden Düsseldorf, Kunst Palast Düsseldorf.

## Lance Fung

**Curator, Artistic Director, SITE Santa Fe 2008, New York City, NY, United States.**

With the encouragement of video / Fluxus artist Nam June Paik, Lance Fung left the directorship of the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1996 to open his own exhibition space. It was here that Mr. Fung investigated his interests in curating solo and group exhibitions. The space became a leading venue in New York allowing Mr. Fung to work with many of the pioneering artists from the Fluxus, Minimal, and Conceptual periods such as Nam June Paik, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Barry. This space has evolved into Fung Collaboratives which has a mission of curating and organizing international art exhibitions.

As independent curator, Mr. Fung has created important exhibitions such as Crossing Parallels at the SSAMZI Space in Seoul, Korea; Going Home at the Edward Hopper Historical Museum in Nyack, New York; Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark at Next: The Venice Architectural Biennale in Venice, Italy and The Snow Show: Venice at The 50th International Art Exhibition / La Biennale di Venezia, Dreams and Conflicts - The Viewer's Dictatorship, in Venice, Italy. One of his most exciting projects was realized in 2004 & 2006, The Snow Show exhibition in Lapland and Torino respectively, presented the collaborative works of forty internationally recognized artists and architects, including Cai Guo-Qiang, Foster and Partners, Kiki Smith and Tadao Ando. This exhibition was successful in terms of catching the attention of the international press and media and its legacy has been preserved by a Thames & Hudson book as well as a BBC documentary.

The project was unique in artistic terms as well, allowing the participants to explore the collaborative process between art and architecture and to create works by using snow and ice as materials. Currently, Mr. Fung is working on two exciting exhibitions. He was recently selected to curate the next SITE Santa Fe Biennial which will open on June 21, 2008. One month later, Mr. Fung will inaugurate his exhibition in Beijing, China in cooperation with The Ministry of Culture, People's Republic of China & the Beijing Summer Olympic Games. This will be the first large scale exhibition of international public art in China.

## Judith Greer

**Art Collector, London, United Kingdom.**

Judith Greer established her reputation as an expert on Japanese contemporary art and culture during her thirteen years in Tokyo. Co-author of the definitive "Tokyo City Guide" (1983), she worked as a freelance journalist, consultant and coordinator for projects including the Walker Art Center's groundbreaking 1986 exhibition "Tokyo Form and Spirit".

From 1986 to 1993 she worked at Tokyo's Hara Museum of Contemporary Art where she became Director of International Programmes. While at the museum she established bilingual education and patronage programs, organized numerous cultural exchange initiatives, and was project director for "A Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors", a monumental travelling exhibition co-organized with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1990. Judith and her husband Richard began collecting contemporary art in Japan. Since moving to London in

1993, they have become friends with and collectors of work by some of today's leading contemporary British artists. Their Ettore Sottsass-designed home was the venue for Tracey Emin's first reading a "Exploration of the Soul" in 1994 and a prominent setting for her 1995 video "Why I never became of Dancer". It was also a major location for Damien Hirst's 1996 feature film "Hanging Around" created for the Hayward Gallery's exhibition "Spellbound". A patron of numerous art institutions, she is a trustee of the Artangel, the London-based arts organization known for realizing artists' visions through exceptional commissions in sites across the UK.

She has given talks and participated in panels in both English and Japanese on subjects including art in public places, the role of the museum, on contemporary art collecting and the importance of both individual and corporate arts patronage. Judith Greer and Louisa Buck's "Owning Art: The Contemporary Art Collector's Handbook" was published in 2006.

## Hassan Khan

**Artist, Composer And Writer, Editor, Bidoun, Cairo, Egypt.**

Hassan Khan (1975) is an artist, a composer and a writer. He lives and works in Cairo. His work has been presented in various exhibitions and institutions in the Middle East and in Europe, such as 'Multitudes-Solitudes', at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Bolzano, Italy, 2003, the project 'Contemporary Arab Representations', curated by Catherine David, Witte De With, Fundacio Antonie Tapies and the BildMuseum (2003), 'Mediterraneans', MACRO, Rome (2004). A selection of his single channel videos and the short film



'Transitions' (Short Documentary Film Jury Award, 6th Ismailia International Film Festival, 2002) has been shown among others at 'Les Mardis de l'artiste', a selection for MK2 by Caroline Bourgeois. Hassan Khan has performed 'Tabla Dubb' – an audio-visual performance - in Cairo, Beirut, Istanbul, Sao Paolo, Amsterdam, Brussels (Kunsten Festival, 2004), at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2004), Castello, Spain (2003). He has been invited by the World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam (2001, 2003), and the Oberhausen ShortFilm Festival (2001, 2002) among others.

The work of Hassan Khan is nourished by the urban reality of Cairo, a city of 16 million inhabitants. Both lascivious and over-surveyed, this gigantic metropolis, drained by various ideological networks, manages the individual and the society in a constant friction of competing matrices. Television and religion, tables and electric guitars, kitsch beauty and promiscuity, everything mixes and problematizes in an acceleration of contemporary data characterising the actual Middle East, and – by extension and translation – any mega city in the world.

## Jitish Kallat

### Artist, Mumbai, India.

Jitish Kallat (b.1974) has had solo shows at Gallery Chemould (Mumbai), Nature Morte (New Delhi), Bodhi Art (Singapore), Bose Pacia Modern (New York), Walsh Gallery (Chicago), Gallery Barry Keldoulis (Sydney) amongst others. His forthcoming solo shows was held at Arario Beijing in July 2007. He has participated in numerous key exhibitions including the 6th Gwangju Biennale (2006); 5th Asia Pacific Triennale, Brisbane (2006); Lille 3000 (2006); 'Passages', Palais De

Beaux Arts, Brussels (2006); 'Another Worlds', Arario Gallery, Cheonan, Korea (2006); 'Indian Summer', Ecole de Beaux Arts, Paris (2005); 'Armory Show', New York (2005); 'Zoom', Culturgest Museum, Lisbon (2004); 'Subterrain', HKW, Berlin (2004); 'The Tree From The Seed', Henie Onstad Kultursenter, Oslo, Norway (2003); 'Under Construction', Japan Foundation Asia Center, Tokyo (2002); 'Century City', Tate Modern, London (2001); 'Seventh Havana Biennial', Havana (2000); '1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale', Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan; 'Art of the World 1998, Passage de Retz, Paris (1998); 'Innenseite', Kassel, Germany (1997), amongst many others. The artist lives and works in Mumbai. He also writes frequently on the subject of contemporary art.

## Nadim Karam

### Architect, Beirut, Lebanon.

An architect who is also a painter, sculptor and urban artist, Nadim Karam focuses on creating dreams for cities. With Atelier Hapsitus, the pluridisciplinary company he founded in Beirut, he has made large-scale urban art projects for various cities, including Beirut, Kwangju, Korea, Prague, Notting Hill, London, Tokyo and Nara. His most recent work, 'The Travellers,' was commissioned by Victoria State and the City of Melbourne in 2006. It tells the story of migrants to Australia through ten three-story high sculptures which move across a bridge and back at set times each day, creating an urban clock for the city and what has become the first moving art work in the world.

He has regularly held academic positions in Tokyo and Beirut, and was Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design at Notre Dame University in Lebanon from

2000-2003. His 1997-2000 urban art project for central Beirut was selected amongst five urban projects worldwide by the Van Alen Institute in New York in 2002 for their exhibition and publication "Remembering, Renewing, Rebuilding" on the role these urban projects played in the rejuvenation of city life and morale after a disaster. In the same year he was selected in 2002 by the UN and the Center of International Cooperation at New York University as co-chairman of a London conference on the reconstruction of Kabul.

Nadim Karam has exhibited his work in the Liverpool, and Kwangju Art and the Venice Architecture Biennales, and was selected as by the first Rotterdam Biennale as the curator directing the Lebanese participation. He regularly gives lectures at universities and international conferences worldwide. Currently a member of the Moutamarat Group design initiative, he is focusing on the study of the rapidly mutating Arab cities, their evolving needs and forms of cultural expression. He is one of the key artists of the DIFC Gulf Art Fair with a large-scale outdoor art installation. He is currently working on a series of urban art projects for the Arab world, expressing the specificity of the region through his own vocabulary of forms. Two books on his works have been published by Booth-Clibborn Editions, London, VOYAGE (2000) and URBAN TOYS, (2006).

## Vasif Kortun

### Director, Platform Garanti, Istanbul, Turkey.

Vasif Kortun is the director of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, in Istanbul (since 2001). He was the founding director of Proje4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art (2001-

2003). Between 1994 and 1997, he worked as the founding director of the Museum of the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. His texts have appeared in many different books, magazines and exhibition catalogs. Jahresring 51: Szene Türkei: Abschiedsaber Tor, a book on Turkey co-authored with Erden Kosova was published in 2004. Recent exhibitions include "Of One and the Many," Platform Garanti CAC, 2006; the 9th International Istanbul Biennial, 2005 (co-curator); "Ahmet Ögüt", 2005, Mala Galerija, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana and "Normalization 1 through 4", (co-curator), Platform. Projects in 2004 include, "Placebo Effect," Sparwasser HQ, Berlin, Istanbul, IFA, Stuttgart and Berlin and "Lastwinterspringnevercame," Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, (co-curator), "Mediterraneans," Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome, (co-curator), Kortun is a collections advisor at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and serves on the Council for the collection of the New Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and is on the board of American Center Foundation, E-Flux, and the Office for Contemporary Art, Norway. He served as a jury member for 26. Graphic Arts, Ljubljana Biennial (2005), 5. Gwangju Biennial (2004), 50th Venice Biennial (2003). Kortun received the 9th annual Award for Curatorial Excellence given by the Center for Curatorial Studies in 2006.

## Ben Langlands, Nikki Bell

### London, United Kingdom, Langlands & Bell, Architects and Designers, London, United Kingdom.

Artists, Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell explore the complex web of relationships linking people and

architecture and the coded systems of circulation and exchange which surround us. Based in London. Langlands & Bell have been collaborating since 1978, and exhibiting internationally since the early 1980's. Known for examining our experience of architecture, and our primarily urban culture at many different levels, Langlands & Bell explore the places and structures we inhabit, and the routes that penetrate and link them. Their work often looks at real buildings and the ways we think about them, revealing their histories and associated human activity while reflecting on the many ways we communicate and relate to each other. The art of Langlands & Bell ranges widely from architectural ground-plans presented as immaculate models or monochrome reliefs, to innovative new media projects, and architecture itself, such as the monumental steel and glass bridge, recently completed at Paddington Basin in London.

In October 2002 Langlands & Bell spent two weeks in Afghanistan researching *The Aftermath of September 11th* and *The War in Afghanistan* for The Imperial War Museum. 'The House of Osama bin Laden' the collection of works made in response to the commission, makes innovative use of interactive digital technologies. In February 2004 'The House of Osama bin Laden' won the BAFTA award for Interactive Arts Installation "the best installation by artists working with interactive digital media today" ([www.bafta.org](http://www.bafta.org)). In 2004 Langlands & Bell were candidates for the 2004 Turner Prize.

In June 2005 Langlands & Bell were awarded a major commission by BAA (British Airports Authority) for two permanent open-air artworks at London's new Heathrow Terminal 5 designed by Richard Rogers Partnership.

Art works by Langlands & Bell are held in the permanent collections of numerous museums and art galleries internationally, including: Arts Council of England, The British Council, The British Museum; The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA; The Center for British Art, Yale, USA; UK Government Art Collection London, Moscow, Tokyo; Museum of Modern Art New York; Saatchi Collection London; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Edinburgh; Tate Gallery London; V&A London. Langlands & Bell have completed major commissions for Fuji Television Network Headquarters, Tokyo, 1997; Obayashi Corporation, Tokyo, 1998; Bloomberg (London) 2002; Dentsu, Tokyo, 2002; British Land, London 2003; Paddington Development Corporation (with the Public Art Development Trust) London, 2004; BT 2005; Bloomberg (New York) 2005.

### **Jean-Hubert Martin Curator, Paris, France.**

Jean-Hubert Martin (born 1944 in Strasbourg) has been curator at the Musée National d'Art Moderne from 1971 to 1982. He has worked as a programmer for the Centre Pompidou which opened in 1977. He has curated both modern and contemporary art exhibitions such as Francis Picabia (1976), Casimir Malevitch (1978), Paris-Berlin (1978), Paris-Moscou (1979). As director of the Kunsthalle Bern from 1982 to 1985, he has organized a contemporary art programme among which the first personal exhibition of Ilya Kabakov. During his directorship of the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou from 1987 to 1990, he has curated the exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" (1989). From 1991 to 1994 he assembled a collection of international contemporary art for the Château d'Oiron. The Musée National des Arts

d'Afrique et d'Océanie was renovated under his direction from 1994 to 1999 with a programme of traditional and contemporary art, mixing artists of the whole world (Galerie des Cinq Continents 1995). He was the curator for the French participation to the Sydney Biennale in 1982 and 1993 and curator of the Biennale de Lyon 2000 ("Sharing Exoticisms"). Jean-Hubert Martin was general director of the Museum Kunst Palast in Düsseldorf from January 2000 until September 2006.

### **Ebrahim Melamed Collector and Founder of Honart Museum Tehran; Tehran, Iran.**

Ebrahim Melamed is a 34 year-old businessman of Persian heritage. He left Tehran at the age of ten, was brought up in Switzerland, and studied in the U.S. He decided to go back to Iran in 1998, taking up the Hygiene and Foods Division of his family's firm Toranto, in Tehran. Melamed's journey with art began in his boyhood, with his businessman father who made regular purchases of classical landscapes from the 18th and 19th century, Turner and the Barbizon School – and of course the Iranian masters. Melamed's personal commitment to contemporary art began with an encounter with Sylvie Fleury, whom he met in Switzerland. Her work was among the first purchases that Melamed made. Another important encounter was with Anish Kapoor whose work he first acquired in 1995. What was missing for Melamed back in Iran, however, was the daily presence of contemporary art. In Tehran the situation of contemporary art is still in an embryonic stage. There are about five or six commercial galleries and

of course a splendid contemporary art museum which has works of international modern masters. Wishing to share his love of contemporary art, Melamed wanted to create a private museum in the city to establish a dialogue between Iranian artists and those from abroad. Slowly the idea of building a foundation took shape, as he traveled around the U.S. and Europe, enlarging his collection with work by artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Ugo Rondinone, or Francis Alys. Working closely with French curator Laurence Dreyfus, he began to compose a more professional and international collection. The choices of course were limited by the rules of Islam: no nudity, no sex, no reference to religion. Then he had to explain his plans to the local authorities, reiterating that Iran has always been traditionally a great country of culture and art and that creation is a corner stone of society. Melamed set out to construct a building for the Foundation in the industrial zone of Tehran, on land owned by his family. The opening date is planned for 2008. While he admits that things in Iran are still a bit behind, he believes that the situation is very encouraging, and that the Foundation will offer great opportunities for artists and art enthusiasts alike.

### **Asma M'Naouar Artist, Tunis, Tunisia.**

Asma M'Naouar, was born in 1965, Tunisia. She lives and works in Tunis. After graduating in Aesthetics and Sciences of Arts at the University of Tunis in 1988, Asma earned a degree at the Rome Art Academy in 1993, and in 2002 she returned in Italy to get her Master in Conservation at Palazzo Spinelli in Florence. Until then, Asma continued her artistic education, spending some time abroad. For

instance, she participated at the Bidzwang Workshop in Luzern (Switzerland), two years later she was a member of the International City of Arts in Paris. Next in 2001, she joined another workshop in Tripoli, Lebanon. During her career, she received various prizes: in 1993, the First Prize of the critics “Giordano Bruno” in Salerno, Italy, and the Sailing Golden Prize at the Biennale of Kuwait in 1996. Her career was consecrated in 1999 by the 1st National Prize of the Tunisian Cultural Ministry. Since 1996, Asma has exhibited regularly in solo at Gallery El Marsa in Tunis. She has taken part in many group exhibitions in Tunisia and abroad like in 1994 at the Covent of Saint Onofrio in Rome, the Gallery MAE in Marseilles, France, and the Museum of Carthage in Tunisia and at the exhibition “Kunswinter” in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Luzern in Switzerland and the same year at the Biennale of Sharjah, UAE. Also, she participated in “Chassé Croisé” - Tunisian and European Painters of the 20th century, Palais Kheirredine, Tunis. Asma has also taken part in the exhibitions “Un Autre Regard” which took place successively at the Museum of Modern Art of Biel, Switzerland, in 1997, and the Palais Kheirredine in Tunis, in 2004. She participated at the World Fair of Hanover, Germany, in 2000 and in 2002, at the 9th summit of the “francophonie” at “Palais de l’UNESCO” in Beirut, followed by the Hordaland International Art Gallery in Bergen, Norway. In 2003, she exhibited at the National Museum of Art in Kaunas, Lithuania, then in 2004, at the Municipal Museum in Pultsk, Poland, followed by “Tunisian women and art” at UNESCO and IMA- Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. The Fondation Pietro Caporella in Rome and the Center Rachid Karamé in

Tripoli in Lebanon have acquired pieces of her work.

**Bob Monk**  
**Director Gagosian Gallery**  
**New York, New York City,**  
**United States.**

Robert Monk’s experience includes eight years at Gagosian Gallery where he is currently Director of the Madison Avenue gallery in New York City. He works with gallery artists including Ed Ruscha, Ellen Gallagher and Richard Artschwager. He also works closely with museums and other institutions to organize exhibitions involving Gagosian Gallery artists, most recently Ed Ruscha’s representation of the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, co-curated by Donna DeSalvo of the Whitney Museum of American Art and Linda Norden of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. He has curated exhibitions including Pop Art: The John and Kimiko Powers Collection and Jasper Johns: Prints from 1987 – 2001 and edits gallery publications like Cy Twombly: A Gathering of Time, Ed Ruscha: Mountain Paintings and Willem De Kooning: Mostly Women. He has worked for the gallery on the catalogue raisonné of Ed Ruscha paintings and is currently working on the catalogues raisonnés of Ed Ruscha drawings, Cy Twombly drawings and Pablo Picasso sculptures. He is also responsible for private sales and client relations.

Mr. Monk was previously the Senior Vice President and Director of Contemporary Art Department at Sotheby’s, where he worked from 1992 – 1997. He was co-owner of Lorence Monk Gallery from 1984 – 1992, specializing in works on paper by American and European masters and paintings and sculpture by younger

artists. Beginning in 1974 he worked on historic exhibitions at Leo Castelli Gallery through 1984. In 1989 Mr. Monk co-published the catalogue raisonné of Bruce Naumans Prints, Photographs and Multiples.

**Mon Muellerschoen**  
**Art Consultant, Munich,**  
**Germany.**

After completing her studies at the Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich and Rome in History of Art, Archaeology, Classical History, with a MA, Muellerschoen established MM-Artmanagement, in the early 90s; a company which offers a wide variety of professional art management services for private and corporate art collectors all over Germany and Europe. MM-Artmanagement’s expertise covers many different types of art disciplines including Paintings and Sculptures, Graphics and Photographs and also Classic Antiquities. At that time, Muellerschoen began to cooperate with Hubert Burda Media and other collectors. She also established the concept of “Art, Media and Communication” for the Hubert Burda Media Collection.

In the mid 90s Move to Los Angeles, California she worked with local artists, producing the book “Look at Me” with Philipp Keel, curating the exhibition “Look at me” at the White Noise Gallery. She also published a book on design; “Classics - The Best the World has to offer” General Publishing Group Santa Monica 1997. Moving back to Munich in 2000, Muellerschoen is the art consultant to Hubert Burda Media – Publishing Company and Roland Berger Strategy Consultants – Consulting Company, among other private collections. [www.mm-artmanagement.de](http://www.mm-artmanagement.de)

**Michelle Nicol**  
**Curator, Writer, Partner,**  
**Glamour Engineering, Zurich,**  
**Switzerland.**

Michelle Nicol studied art history and film at the university of Zurich (lic.phil.I) and is managing partner of advertising agency glamour engineering™.

She has worked as critic and curator of contemporary art for international institutions including the Berlin Biennale and the Museum Ludwig Cologne. Appointed curator of the Windsor collection of contemporary photography. Author of various artist monographs and contributor to Parkett.

Simultaneously Michelle Nicol has worked the field of fashion and reported for a string of national and international publications such as Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Die Weltwoche, Welt am Sonntag, Self Service on the next big thing in the world of style. In 2001 Michelle Nicol co-founded the advertising agency glamour engineering™ together with partners from classic advertising. Here she takes the lead in overseeing client relationships with art-related projects & brand entertainment for brands such as Art Basel, Cartier International, Allianz Risk Transfer, Zurich Financial Services, Swarovski and others.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**  
**Co-director Of Exhibitions**  
**And Programmes, Director**  
**of International Projects,**  
**Serpentine Gallery, London,**  
**United Kingdom.**

Hans Ulrich Obrist was born in Zurich in May 1968. He joined the Serpentine Gallery as Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects in April 2006.



Prior to this he was Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris since 2000, as well as curator of museum in progress, Vienna, from 1993-2000. He has curated over 150 exhibitions internationally since 1991, including do it, Take Me, I'm Yours (Serpentine Gallery), Cities on the Move, Live/Life, Nuit Blanche, 1st Berlin Biennale, Manifesta 1, and more recently Uncertain States of America, 1st Moscow Triennale and 2nd Guangzhou Biennale (Canton China).

Hans Ulrich Obrist has also co-curated many monographic shows at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, such as Olafur Eliasson, Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Anri Sala, Steve McQueen and Doug Aitken.

### **Otto Pieni**

#### **Artist, Düsseldorf, Germany.**

Otto Pieni was born 1928 in Bad Laasphe and was raised in Lübbecke. Between 1949 and 1953 he studied painting and art education at the Academy of Art in Munich and the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. He was lecturer at the Fashion Institute in Düsseldorf. From 1952 to 1957 he studied philosophy at the University of Cologne. He was a Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania beginning in 1964. From 1968 to 1971, he was the first Fellow of the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS), founded by Gyorgy Kepes. In 1972, he became a Professor of Environmental Art at MIT. In 1974 he succeeded Kepes as director of the CAVS, in which position he served until 1994.

The University of Maryland Baltimore County awarded Pieni an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts in 1994. In 1996, he received the Sculpture Prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York. In 1957, Pieni and Heinz

Mack founded the group ZERO. In 1961, Günther Uecker joined the group. Beginning in 1959, Pieni created the works Lichtballette ("light ballet") and Rauchbilder ("smoke pictures"), referring to elementary natural energies. Pieni exhibited works at documenta in 1959, 1964 and 1977. Otto Pieni continues the practice of "smoke pictures" through today. Fire and smoke (their traces) are important elements in these pictures. He experimented also with multimedia combinations. In 1963, together with Günther Uecker and Heinz Mack, he became spokesman of Neuen Idealismus ("the new idealism"). In addition, Pieni arranged the German pavilion for the 1967 and 1971 Venice Biennales. In 1985, he exhibited at the São Paulo Biennial. For the closing of the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, Pieni created the sky work Olympic Rainbow.

Pieni lives and works today in Groton, Massachusetts and Düsseldorf.

### **Jack Persekian**

#### **Curator And Producer, Artistic Director, Sharjah Biennial 8, Lives In Jerusalem.**

Artistic Director: Jack Persekian - Curator and Producer, Founding Director of Anadiel Gallery and, the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem. Head curator of Sharjah Biennial 7 (2005). Recent curated exhibitions include: Reconsidering Palestinian Art, Fundación Antonio Perez, Cuenca, Spain (2006); Disorientation – Contemporary Arab Artists from the Middle East, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2003); in weiter ferne, so nah, neue palastinensische kunst, Ifa Galleries in Bonn, Stuttgart and Berlin (2002); Official Palestinian

Representation to the XXIV Biennale de São Paulo. Additional productions and directing include: The Palestinian Cultural Evening at the World Economic Forum in the Dead Sea, Jordan (2004), The Geneva Initiative, Public Commitment Event (2003), the Millennium Celebrations in Bethlehem - Bethlehem 2000. Short films and video works: "A Ball and a Coloring Box", "myson", "the last 5 short films of the millennium" and "the first 4 short films of the millennium" in collaboration with Palestinian filmmakers.

### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

#### **Director, Serpentine Gallery, London. United Kingdom.**

Julia Peyton-Jones studied painting at the Royal College of Art, London, and worked as a practising artist in London and a lecturer in fine art at Edinburgh College of Art. She moved to the Hayward Gallery in 1988 as curator of exhibitions. In 1991 she became Director of the Serpentine Gallery where she has been responsible for both commissioning and showcasing ground-breaking exhibition, education and public programmes as well as the annual architecture commission, the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, which she conceived. Under the patronage of Diana, Princess of Wales, the Serpentine completed a £4 million renovation in 1998. Since then, visitor numbers have increased almost three-fold to 750,000 per year. She serves on numerous committees and panels including the Westminster Public Art Advisory Panel, and was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Art in 1997. In 2003 she was made both an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and appointed OBE (Order of the British Empire). In 2007 she

attended the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland.

### **Ali-Reza Sami-Azar**

#### **Curator, Writer, Tehran, Iran.**

Ali-Reza Sami-Azar was born in 1961 in Iran. After completing his studies with an M.A. in Architecture from Tehran University, and a PHD in Architecture from the University of Central England he held a number of academic positions in Iran, from Professor of Art & Architecture at Tehran University since 1996, to Head of the Art Research Department, Faculty of Fine Art, 1997-2004 and Professor of Art & Architecture at the Art University since 2005. A forerunner in bringing modern and contemporary art to Iran, he was the Director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art from 1997-2005, and is a Member of the Supreme Council of Mason des Artists in Iran and an Honorary Member of the Iranian Painters Society. He was also Head of the Iranian Visual Art Center, 1997-2005. Sami-Azar has authored many books on art and has presented many papers on the impact of modern painting and architecture in the region including research he has been doing on how culture affects education.

In 2003 he received "The Gold Medal of Honor", for outstanding achievement in promoting art as director of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, bestowed by the American National Arts Club, 2003

## Jerome Sans

### Director Of Programme, Baltic- Contemporary Art Centre.

Jerome Sans (Born in 1960) is Director of Programme, Baltic- Contemporary Art Centre ([www.balticmill.com](http://www.balticmill.com)). He is also Adjunct curator at Magasin 3, Stockholm Konsthall, Sweden: [www.magasin3.com](http://www.magasin3.com). Sans is a Board Member of The NMAC Foundation in Montemedio, Spain, a collection of outdoor contemporary art created in harmony with the natural landscape of Montemedio Park: [www.fundacionmac.com](http://www.fundacionmac.com). From 2000 to February 2006 Founder and co-Director (with Nicolas Bourriaud) of the Palais de Tokyo site for contemporary art creation, Paris. Since 2002, in the context of his work with the Palais de Tokyo, he has organized and curated over 70 solo exhibitions, including those of Tobias Rehberger, Chen Zhen, Wolfgang Tillmans, Kendell Geers, Candice Breitz, Wang Du, among others, as well as six group shows; Translation, Hardcore, Live, GNS,...

From 1996 to 2003 Sans was Adjunct curator at the Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee (Wisconsin) USA. Sans is also the curator of numerous other international exhibitions outside the institution such as, "Fictions" in the Montreal International Airport, "Shopping" in 25 different stores through Soho (New York), "infrasound" in various public spaces in Hamburg, "on board" on a boat in Venice, "Streetlife" at Project Row Houses, in shot guns houses, Houston, Texas. He collaborates with international Art magazines such as Flash Art, Artforum, Artpress, UOVO, Journal of Contemporary Art, Sisky, Grand Street.

## Solmaz Shahbazi

### Artist, Stuttgart, Germany.

Solmaz Shahbazi was born in Tehran in 1971 and has been living in Germany since 1985. She studied Architecture and Design at the Akademie der bildenden Kuenste in Stuttgart. Before she began to engage in film, she had mainly been working as an architect. Her first film Tehran 1380 (2002) is a co-production with Tirdad Zolghadr. The filmmakers cast an ironic view on urban structures and ways of living in the wildly growing metropolis of Tehran. Shahbazi uses the documentary format in both her videos and her photography as a tool to analyse different modes of imagery, expectations of the unknown and affecting perception. Her collection of images testify to the potentially fictitious nature of the photographic medium, providing a view as to how we filter images, formulate conceptions - and ultimately awakening us to the fallibility of preconception, the power of the photographic frame. In addition to the 7th Sharjah Biennial and the 9th International Istanbul Biennial in 2005 Shahbazi's work has been exhibited widely in Europe, USA and the Middle East since 2001.

## Jill Silverman

### Van Coenegrachts, Partner, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris.

Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts is a partner of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Paris. A gallerist in New York, London and now Paris, she has worked in the contemporary art world since the late 1970's following an early career as a cultural journalist for the New York Times where she wrote on dance, music, architecture and performance art. She was the director of John Gibson Gallery, New York from 1978

for a decade. She worked with Barbara Mathes, and subsequently opened her own office as a private dealer. In 1995 she moved to London and two years later became the managing director of Lisson Gallery. Last year she was appointed the Paris partner of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac. Mrs. Van Coenegrachts was born in El Paso, Texas and raised in Philadelphia; she studied art history and comparative literature, receiving an undergraduate degree from Trinity College, Hartford Ct. And graduate degrees from Tufts University and City University of New York, the Graduate Center. She was recently awarded the Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in France for her work on the rejuvenation of the French Art Fair, FIAC. When not travelling and working in Paris she lives with her husband in London.

## Jalal Toufic

### Writer, Film Theorist And Video Artist, Beirut, Lebanon.

Jalal Toufic is a writer, film theorist, and artist. He is the author of *Distracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), and '*Āshūrā*': *This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005). His videos and mixed-media works have been presented internationally, in such venues as Artists Space, in New York; Witte de With, in Rotterdam; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, in Barcelona; Kunsthalle Fridericianum, in Kassel; the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens; and the 16th International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) in a "Focus Jalal Toufic" programme. He co-edited the special *Discourse* issue *Gilles Deleuze: A Reason to Believe in this World*, and edited the special *Discourse*

issues *Middle Eastern Films Before Thy Gaze Returns to Thee* and *Mortals to Death* as well as the *Review of Photographic Memory* (Arab Image Foundation, 2004). He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, USC, and, in Amsterdam, DasArts and the Rijksakademie. <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>.

## Tirdad Zolghadr

### Curator And Writer, Zurich, Switzerland.

Tirdad Zolghadr works as a freelance curator, writes for Frieze magazine and has also contributed to Parkett, Bidoun, Cabinet, afterall, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Straits Times Singapore and other publications. After his MA in Comparative Literature he began work in the field of journalism and documentary film, being a co-founder of the Tehran-based online publication Bad Jens in 1999, and co-director of Tehran 1380 (with Solmaz Shahbazi), a documentary on Tehran mass housing in 2002. His recent "Tropical Modernism" explores the history of Iranian socialism and was premiered at the Oberhausen Short Film Festival 2006. Since 2004, Zolghadr has curated events at Cubitt London, IASPIS Stockholm, Kunsthalle Geneva, various Tehran artspaces and other venues. He was co-curator of the International Sharjah Biennial 2005, and is currently preparing a long-term exhibition and research project addressing social class in the art world that will take place at Gasworks London, Platform Istanbul and Tensta Konsthall. Zolghadr is also a founding member of the SHAHRZAD art & design collective and will shortly publish his his novel Softcore with Telegram Books, London.

## Speakers' statements

### Bob Monk

**Director, Gagosian Gallery,  
New York, USA.**

The personal has returned to art-making precisely in tandem with the rise of the concept termed “globalism”. This return of focus to the individual in art is the best thing to come out of what is really just economic slang. Rather than believing that they must follow a well-trodden and institutionally sanctioned path that dictates how contemporary art should look and be looked at, young artists now create work that is more idiosyncratic and spontaneous. As the world becomes a smaller yet more diverse place, the supremacy of the artistic “movement” inevitably wanes. As a result, personal expression by artists everywhere in the world is valued and encouraged. The works of art being made in, say, the Middle East, that reflect a deep cultural tradition from within the individual creating the art, can now be exhibited alongside works made by artists from the West with equal footing. The unique perspective of the individual artist is now considered essential and is better appreciated by viewers everywhere in the world. It may take some effort for an unfamiliar viewer to decipher a given work, but nonetheless, global art production is now approached equally with intellectual and visual fascination.

### Camilla Cañellas

**Writer, Critic, Curator,  
Barcelona, Spain.**

The next 10 years of contemporary art in the Middle East will need to be a period of consolidation and reflection for artists and curators alike. The post 9/11 scramble for western curators, galleries and institutions to have a ‘slice of the action’ from the Middle East has undoubtedly raised the profile and awareness of contemporary art practice in the region but at the expense, in many cases, of firmly built foundations and trusted relationships.

If the future is to be bright, artists from the region will need to have access to the same opportunities and platforms that their peers have elsewhere. This is the responsibility not just of the big international institutions, but also of the local and regional structures that are benefiting from this new cultural economy and creating a market with commercial interests.

It is all too tempting to use art and culture as an economic driver and tourism ticket: the danger is when we value art for its “impact” within society and forget to look at its intrinsic value. Art needs to be seen as an integral and essential part of civil society, not just an add-on that ticks the “culture” box!

The key issues for the next 10 years are unquestionably that of sustainability – in terms of sustaining the art market in the region; investing in the younger generation of artists coming out of art

schools, and giving them a self-confidence, whilst at the same time recognising and valuing those artists already established by giving them an incentive to continue living and working in the region, rather than being tempted abroad. Above all, there is a need for political stability in the region to enable this infrastructure and talent to develop.

In practical terms, the continuity of the art scene can be supported by investing in the infrastructure on the “ground” – not just building white galleries for artists to show that work in, but by developing exchange programmes to nurture new relationships; develop international residency schemes to provide thinking space; create new teaching posts and open up new courses within the region’s higher education structures; provide professional development opportunities for artists and curators alike in the region to push new boundaries; and provide institutional partnerships for art schools, thereby creating new dialogues and encouraging artistic freedoms.

This sustainability can also be achieved by investment from international galleries and institutions in acquiring work for collections and exhibiting and commissioning new work. There is still a large body of work unrepresented in international museum and gallery collections. The irony is that, if the last 10 years are anything to go on, it is the more conservative institutions with more historical interests, such as The British Museum and The Smithsonian Institution, that take the greater risks and were in fact buying contemporary work in a quiet but consistent way at a time when other major contemporary art institutions were betting on a different horse with higher odds,

focussing on places such as Latin America (which already had an established art market) in spite of the growing interest and charged political climate of the Middle East! The vision of places such as the Smithsonian and the British Museum not only enabled them to acquire works while this market was at an embryonic stage and therefore affordable, but has also earned them kudos and respect from many of the artists.

Lastly, with the information revolution currently as it stands, and the capacity and potential of the artist today to reach and communicate with a “public” worldwide through media tools such as blogs, forums, online communities, podcasts and mobile phones, etc., art now has the potential to change the way the world is perceived and the way we think. As Chris Wise, the Professor of Engineering Design at Imperial College London, recently predicted, “We are on the verge of a thought revolution. Ideas are the key for the future.”

A serious commitment to growing and developing the arts scene in the Middle East is paramount and may have a legacy beyond that which we can predict but it is sobering to think that, at the very least, it may contribute to a climate of open and independent thought in the region.

### Jan Dalley

**Arts Editor, The Financial  
Times, London, United  
Kingdom.**

Contemporary art, to the great surprise of some, is proving to be one of the most powerful and durable of international languages. It has spread across the world, and the cross-cultural reach of its leading practitioners can



harness the power to dissolve national and linguistic boundaries and provide the kinds of links that are achieved by few other means. Art civilizes us all, and art that unites us, or helps us towards a shared understanding of deep values, must be embraced as a beacon of hope in a world that is threatened every day by rifts of religion, politics and culture.

Over the next ten years, it is likely that the dramatic collision of innovation and tradition that is the challenge contemporary art presents to us all, will have especially far-reaching consequences in the Middle East. Not only economically but also socially, most countries and regions of the world find that the art market has a strong effect. As the market's tentacles reach outwards and embrace the wider structure of any country, moving into people's consciousness and ways of perceiving the world, into its education and the ambitions of its young people, so change happens. The enthusiastic and open-minded support for the contemporary arts shown by some Middle Eastern countries indicates how warmly these effects will be embraced over the next decade.

**William Wells**  
**Director, Townhouse**  
**Gallery, Cairo, Egypt.**

During the past ten years we've seen an enormous shift in contemporary arts practice in the Middle East. Throughout the nineties, following a period of relative isolation and immobility, artists began to deviate from the commercial norms of painting and sculpture to experiment with new media: photo, video and installation. Work began to emerge and a new generation of artists, heavily influenced by the growth in global

communications, started to take some risks. The results were exciting and transforming and soon galleries and spaces were established that were willing to accept this work, providing a platform and arena for artistic discussion. It took longer for audiences to come to terms with the shift, at first viewing this output as merely entertaining and exotic. But over the past five years, with the growth in telecommunication companies and with more money entering the arena, a young, bright and inquisitive audience has come of age, and they have a thirst for work that is provocative and, essentially, intrinsically connected with the world they live in.

Networks of communication have been established within the region, so today it is not uncommon for a gallery in Bahrain to work with, exhibit and support artists living in Cairo, Beirut, Palestine or Dubai; and it's this network that has allowed for a sharing of information and influences, that in turn has enriched cultural production.

These cultural changes, taking place in a political and economic climate that is naturally shining light on the region, have grabbed the attention of the international art world. Whereas previously artists from the Middle East were largely invisible to the US and Europe, suddenly "The West" is coming to us, whether it be in the form of curators, researchers, writers or major auction houses. The reorganisation and blossoming of arts forums, fairs and biennales in the region – in Sharjah, Cairo, Istanbul, Beirut and at the DIFC Gulf Art Fair – have been an additional catalyst for this creative environment.

However, although this is a positive and productive period for our

contemporary art, we must be aware that there is a danger the focus will shift too dramatically, and that the commercial forces that go hand-in-hand with such attention will begin to overwhelm independence, artistic integrity, regional discussion and an open-minded creative attitude – all essential ingredients for a continuation in our cultural growth. To combat this, it is crucial that there is continued investment in the production of work and encouragement of dialogue. Whether it be technical expertise, arts management or critical writing, it is imperative that intensive discussions in the form of seminars and workshops continue as a backdrop to exhibitions, residencies and exchange programmes. The next ten years could be an incredibly positive period if the international contemporary art world feeds into creative opportunities and allows artists here to maintain their independence and dialogue. After all, should the political focus shift from the region, and with it the focus of the international art scene, we must be left with a foundation that can support continued growth.

**Asma M'Naouar**  
**Artist, Tunis, Tunisia.**

The current geopolitical situation has made contemporary art limited to isolated creative expressions in each of our countries, without any possibility of communication among artists.

Even though we have the same Arab Islamic history and culture, it is obvious that there is nothing that unites the whole Arab world and allows communication among artists. Positioning the Middle East as a platform for contemporary art – as we see in London, New York and Hong

Kong – will introduce new mechanisms such as art publications, debates and workshops, which will contribute to the creation of a network at the service of contemporary art.

In order to allow future generations to believe in a status of "artist of the world", we need to transform our differences into a rich diversified creative power from which the contemporary art scene will eventually get inspiration.

In the next ten years, a dialogue between East and West might develop, thanks to this platform. Better communication, ideas, brainstorming between artists from all the regions in the Middle East might be possible; that way, the Middle East will be perceived by the rest of the world as more united. Hopefully, it will strengthen the region as a driving force and will contribute to a global dialogue within contemporary art. Will artists from the Middle East be perceived as actors of the contemporary art scene? Or will a distinct Middle Eastern scene arise?

**Hassan Khan**  
**Editor, Bidoun Magazine,**  
**Cairo, Egypt.**

Although one could begin with general and oft-repeated questions like, "What is the Middle East? What is the 'contemporary'?" and still remain pertinent, one suspects that such questions have become exhausted and lost their ability, through constant repetition, to rouse an engaged response. Categories might be fluid yet ruled by the iron fist of interest and power. Why is this geographical region framed the way it is? Why is contemporary art expected to have a quantifiable impact? What role is it supposed to play? Are we then the pioneers of a new etiquette, a well-

designed smooth interface between the signifiers of a chrome-plated future and the context through which that future will be literally fuelled? And do the globally sleek seek solace in each other's bosom? But who then speaks the voice possessed? And is deep-seated paranoia at least partially justified? Why are these two categories (the contemporary and the East) implicitly being separated? What makes a man sweeping the floor while repeating the mantra of a video loop maybe more valuable than a generalized description of a work in a biennale catalogue? When does the moment the surprised and hysterical chorus of the media servants of the state actually become valuable? How is it possible to speak through audiences rather than at them? Can you encounter the local intelligentsia caught as they are in deadly paradoxes? But who whispers your secret name? And if one arrogantly and proudly lays claim to an international arena, how is one to come to terms with the demands of that field, the tyranny of identity, function and information?

**Saleh Barakat**

**Art Expert, Beirut, Lebanon.**

Contemporary art in the Middle East is a fairly recent tradition that goes back a bit more than a century in the Levant to less than a few decades in the Gulf. And so far, it has never been considered by the local societies as an important component in their development and progress. There is a deficiency in the art market infrastructures, an absence of serious dedicated museums, a non-existence of references, a lack in the specialized publications, insufficiency of protective legislation...etc. In the best of cases, it was a capricious decorative hobby for the happy few.

However, with the recent boom in the Gulf, and the positioning of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha as new emerging world capitals, the Arab societies started to face new challenges. In this era of globalization, the secret word for being competitive is to be creative. There is diffusion, recuperation and extension of the "artistic" values in the economic "imaginary" that place the creative entrepreneur at the heart of the social dynamics. Avant-garde artists can thus become the model for the entrepreneurial ethos because they are champions of innovation and creation in a changing world where no need is predetermined and where the supply creates demand.

In parallel, in this modern Middle East, people are generally exposed to the best of contemporary thought and technology, and it is becoming increasingly important that they also be exposed to the best of contemporary creativity. By associating themselves to vibrant art, the up-and-coming societies sustain their image as young, dynamic, tonic and full of life. Art provides the spiritual material necessary to maintain any society in evolution, and if the momentum today is to be sustained, the Arab world needs to empower contemporary art as one of the main sources of inspiration and energy.

Finally, only culture and art survives history. Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* cites: "So well he governed all his trade affairs, with bargains and with borrowing and shares. Indeed he was a worthy man withal. But, sooth to say, his name I can't recall." If the new emerging Arab societies want to be part of the future, they have to hedge on art and culture. There is no way around it!

**Jean-Hubert Martin,**  
**Curator, Direction des**  
**Musées de France,**  
**Paris, France.**

L'art commence enfin à sortir du ghetto américano-européen et à se monter dans le monde entier. Il était temps. De tous les domaines de la culture, c'est celui qui souffre le plus de la tendance au repli sur soi. 110 Biennales ont lieu actuellement dans le monde entier. Il est normal que les amateurs et les curieux puissent avoir connaissance des derniers développements de l'art dans leur région, sans forcément être obligés d'assister aux grandes messes européennes que sont la Biennale de Venise et la Documenta. Quand on évoque la culture au Proche Orient, ce sont toujours les mots de développement financier accéléré et de tourisme qui sont prononcés. Que l'art et l'argent aient partie liée, n'est rien de neuf. Il en a toujours été ainsi. Quant au tourisme, lorsque les intellectuels en parlent, cela concerne bizarrement toujours d'hypothétiques autres ! L'essentiel des visiteurs de grands musées sont des touristes dans les métropoles européennes et ailleurs. Le tourisme culturel participe aujourd'hui à l'éducation, à la connaissance réciproque et à une compréhension entre les cultures. Il a par ailleurs contribué dans certaines régions à maintenir des traditions de spectacle en voie de disparition. On peut par ailleurs espérer que la naissance d'une foire de l'art et l'ouverture de musées va permettre l'émergence de nouveaux artistes et la diffusion de ceux qui œuvrent dans la région, avec jusqu'à présent de maigres chances d'accéder au réseau de diffusion valorisant.

Art finally starts to emerge from the European and American ghetto and is revealed to the whole world, and it is about time. Of all the fields of culture, visual arts seem to suffer most from the tendency to become too self-referential and self-satisfying. 110 biennials currently take place in the world today, so it is normal that art lovers and curious passers-by can stay informed on the latest developments of art in their area, locally, without inevitably being obliged to attend the great European blockbuster events like the Venice Biennale or Documenta.

When one refers to culture in the Middle East, the first things mentioned are accelerated financial development and tourism. The constant discrepancy between art and money is nothing new. That has always been an issue. When intellectuals, however, broach the topic of tourism they always seem to feel it does not concern them directly. The fact of the matter is that most visitors to important museums in major cities are tourists.

Cultural tourism today has a significant role to play in intercultural relations. It also contributes directly to the preservation of cultural heritage.

One can only hope that with the birth of every new art fair or museum opening, there will also come the emergence of new artists and the future growth of art appreciation in any region.

**Judith Greer**  
**Collector, London,**  
**United Kingdom.**

The contemporary art world is an increasingly global community. Artists, curators, writers, dealers, advisors, and collectors travel throughout the world

and in one way or another support the process of art making in an ever-widening circuit of cultural communities. The Middle East, China,

Korea, Latin America, India, and Africa have now become recognized as essential participants in what is an inescapably international art dialogue. The art that brings this world together is what we call “contemporary”. It is art born from the here and now, rooted in our cultural pasts, reflective of our present conditions, and suggestive of our possible futures. It can reveal local preoccupations as well as universal truths.

Being of the present, contemporary art is best understood by experience and engagement– the experience of the art itself and the personal engagement between the individuals compelled by the power of new art.

The contemporary art world is founded on these relationships. Art draws people together from around the globe and initiates conversations that are fundamentally based on our common humanity.

The Middle East can offer the art world a new locus for this experience and engagement. Between the worlds of Asia, Africa and Europe, the Middle East has a rich cultural tradition that can form the foundations for a new international centre of creativity.

The DIFC Gulf Art Fair in Dubai, the Sharjah Biennale, the ambitious new museums planned in Abu Dhabi – these and other projects will enrich the cultural landscape of this region. Artists will visit to make and show work. Curators will come to research and create exhibitions. Collectors will travel in search of new artists whose talents are perhaps not yet known abroad.

Some of what these often influential people bring to the Middle East will stay behind, while what they see and learn will return with them and become part of the contemporary art world’s global conversation.

### **Jitish Kallat**

#### **Visual Artist, Mumbai, India.**

If the last century was about a vast assortment of art movements, the 21st century is about the relentless movement of art. As art traverses national boundaries, the highly jet-lagged international art tribes tirelessly criss-cross the globe. The large-scale art exhibit (biennale, art fair, etc.) becomes an elevated transit lounge where many perceptions are changed and some stereotypes are reinforced. New human links get established and the circumference of the club wherein the codes of contemporary art are choreographed gets expanded, bringing in new members along with their fresh moves.

The Middle East has caught the cyclical fancy of the international art world just like Latin America, Africa and China. India is experiencing a similar surge in international interest. This is largely due to the internal rigour of the art being produced in these regions, set against the eventful backdrop of accelerated changes in social, economic and political arenas; however, it is also partly due to the desire for the dissimilar, which is a key aspect of the globalisation process.

I’m convinced about the “soft power” of contemporary art to establish communities across borders, red tape and divides. The friendship amongst young and mid-career artists across India and Pakistan is an example. The vitality of the contemporary art produced in the Middle East and a series of pro-active efforts such as the

Sharjah Biennale, the DIFC Gulf Art Fair and artist-led initiatives such as the Wasla Art Workshop in Cairo, open doors for the world to culturally engage with the region. These interactions help dismantle and upturn the highly restrictive, quick caricatures of the region rendered by the global media (for its own ulterior motives) through the images of war, regressive puppet regimes, victims, dictators, fanatics, oil wealth, etc.

### **Ben Langlands & Nikki Bell**

#### **Langlands & Bell, Architects and Designers, London, United Kingdom.**

To begin, let’s not separate the Middle East and contemporary art. The Middle East is a complex constellation of peoples and cultures, and it is also a dynamic point of global articulation in today’s world. With its pivotal cultural, economic and political position now and throughout history, the Middle East is, or should be, of immeasurable significance in every key area of all our lives, not least contemporary art and architecture.

Contemporary art has the potential to be an inclusive arena in which people from many diverse worlds come together to share experiences and develop their common interest in art. In this way, new connections are made and new routes of communication opened up. The kaleidoscope of perspectives that contemporary art and architecture offers us contributes fresh insights into behaviours and relationships that may sometimes be stalled or appear fixed in opposition to each other. By creating new languages to address current issues, these two disciplines have the potential to challenge norms, cross social and cultural boundaries, and engage

people in a fresh way. With contemporary art and architecture, we re-focus our identity in the present and thereby empower ourselves.

To increase the potential of contemporary art and architecture anywhere, it is only necessary for creatively inclined people to start working together.

New technologies now make such collaboration easier and faster than ever before. The Middle East will affect contemporary art by fostering more opportunities of this kind. The Global Art Forum in Dubai is an important example of this. Building a public art museum might be another.

### **Jill Silverman**

#### **Partner, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, France.**

It is an optimistic cultural observer who hazards a position on the possible influence of contemporary art on the Middle East in the coming decade.

Over ten years ago in Jerusalem – it was June 1995 to be exact – the thirtieth anniversary of the Israel Museum coincided with the annual meeting of Global Asset Management, an occasion that brought not only people from around the globe but also from many sectors of the region.

There was an enormous optimism that culture could heal old wounds, promote new channels for discourse and understanding and emerge as a way for future generations to participate in a common project, while coming from diverse and often opposing backgrounds. There was a provisional peace plan in the region, and at the time, many believed in a new Middle Eastern model wherein the major religions could live as neighbours sharing their disparate



cultural and political identities. There were discussions of new museums, galleries and art schools across the boundaries, from Ramallah to Jordan, including Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iran.

Much has transpired in these past ten years to make an optimist reflective.

But the benefits, the energy and resourcefulness of the artistic sensibility, have not been buried by the numerous ideologies that have crept into the public debate across the region. Contemporary art carries within it the seeds of the questioning mind, of a visionary context that conceptualizes a view so large that it both criticizes and compliments those in its wake in equal measure. It both laughs at and embraces against prevailing wisdom. It can be both beautiful, if not sublime, or subversive, which many worry about. It has the capacity to bridge differences in its roundabout method of mixing and shaking up those in its arena as the Middle East searches for new, more inclusive, models.

Contemporary art ought to function beyond language. Like a profound universal intuition that can guide on a visceral level long before the rigors of the mind become involved, it offers new paradigms and appeals to humanity, which is all too often lost under the pressure of specific rhetorical positions and political campaigns. It is specific to its place of production yet has the capacity to travel and portray little-heard points of view in a wider context. To be an artist today in the Middle East, or in any emerging part of the world, is a risky proposition at best but one that needs to be tended like a garden. It will nurture the deep compassion that resides in every human spirit, and it is

on this basis that the contemporary art world can hold a rare and unique place in the Middle East of the future.

**Charles Asprey**  
**Curator and Collector,**  
**Charles Asprey Award for**  
**Palestinian Art, London,**  
**United Kingdom.**

Many people are questioning the need for an art fair in Dubai. For me it is an obvious decision. In a region that is not immediately associated with contemporary artistic production, this fair offers the chance for people to experience global art practices first-hand whilst providing much needed support for the emerging regional art scene.

Increasingly artists from Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon and elsewhere are being included in major international exhibitions and biennials with the full extent of the quality of this work becoming better understood. The result has been to extend interest in the region as a whole, and within a few years Dubai can undoubtedly become a centre of cultural as well as commercial excellence, so long as it does not seek to imitate existing models too precisely.

The region that we in the West euphemistically call “The Middle East” is a part of the world that urgently needs, and deserves, to be better understood. In this respect, the timing of the first DIFC Gulf Art Fair could not come at a more opportune moment, as cultural events have been proven to be one of the most successful ways of engaging people from different countries in a shared dialogue. By good fortune of its geographical and perceived position, Dubai can continue to be a bridge

between the Oriental and Western traditions. I very much look forward to the seeing the fair, and then watching its influence grow.

**Tirdad Zolghadr**  
**Curator, Zurich, Switzerland.**

I do not believe the Middle East will “affect” contemporary art on a global scale in any decisive manner other than offering both a production site and a market for easily commercialized art objects. The way things are going now, contemporary art will be a polarized affair, with an increasingly beleaguered minority of self-funded, embittered practitioners who still cling to idea of art as a space for alternative ways of thinking and doing, and, on the other hand, the market dictating the overwhelming majority of initiatives. The latter will be colourful, multi-ethnic, interdisciplinary, and even “critical” in theory and discourse. In some ways, it may well be more lively and interesting than the former “dissident” variant. But it will not be self-reflexive, nor in any way innovative in the “critical” or “subversive” sense of the term. My guess is that the Middle East will successfully aspire to feed and inform this rapidly budding market and influence it exclusively by widening the choice of flavours on the smorgasbord.

**Jalal Toufic**  
**Writer, film theorist, and**  
**video artist, Beirut, Lebanon.**

I’ve been asked by the organisers of the first edition of the Global Art Forum at DIFC Gulf Art Fair (2007): “How will contemporary art affect the Middle East in the next 10 years? How will the Middle East affect contemporary art in the next ten years”? Notwithstanding all the talk about globalization, it is doubtful that

these two coming ten years, that of the contemporary art and that of the Middle East, are commensurable. Indeed let us hope that the present incommensurability between the two ten years would not grow even more pronounced. The more the incommensurability grows, the more it is, for the most part, the *Sûfi* (“a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count” [Qur’ân 32:5; cf. Qur’ân 70:4]) and the messianic (“Were there to remain only one day, God would extend that day until the Mahdi would issue from my children” [tradition traced back to the prophet Muhammad]) in the Middle East that are going to be able to still interact in an adequate temporal manner with those who, while collaborating in an untimely manner in their artistic or literary or philosophical works, are living in a timely manner in the Developed World, where, according to Ray Kurzweil, “the twenty-first century will see about a thousand times greater technological change than its predecessor.” Taking into consideration the legacy of the forthcoming (à la Nietzsche’s “What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming... : the advent of nihilism”) in artwork and thought, maybe the following two questions would be even more difficult to answer now and indeed can be answered by those who are not untimely collaborators only *après-coup*: how is contemporary art, including work by Middle Eastern artists, presently affecting the Middle East, and how is the Middle East (for example through my book *Forthcoming* [2000]), or through the work of the great *Sûfi* Ibn ‘Arabi on ‘*âlam al-mithâl*, the Imaginal World, and the discontinuous imagination [ *al-khayâl al-munfasil*] – which is independent of the viewing

subject – that the latter makes possible) presently affecting contemporary art (for example, in its exploration of virtual reality and simulation)?

### **Ebrahim Melamed** **Director of the Honart** **Museum, Tehran, Iran.**

From forced mourning to renaissance: at the revolution, art was in forced mourning. To begin with, the country was in complete isolation; it was literally cut off from the rest of the world. And that, of course, was true in the artistic and cultural domain. Artists and audience had no idea of what was happening outside Iran: new ways taken by foreign artists, the evolution of forms, of media used, of questions raised.

Experimental art and, more generally, contemporary art was considered a pure product of Western culture and on top of everything an imposture, a hoax. The State supported two kinds of art: art that bolstered the ideology of the Islamic Republic – that is, Revolutionary art and then the art born of the Iran-Iraq war – and traditional art. For years the Henry Moore sculptures in the Contemporary Art Museum were encircled by calligraphy, by miniatures or by pictures on religious themes. For years the government did not want the museum to live up to its name. This State negligence gave birth to art that learned to find its own signs in order to be heard. I do not think it relevant to speak of underground artists.

Because the daily life of Iranians was itself underground, because people remained hidden in order to live freely, artists wanted to make themselves heard, to be up on the surface. So they had to learn to express

their ideas differently, to get around certain themes treated too directly, to find ways to show their work despite the reticence of the authorities.

In Iran, the line between official and unofficial art was opaque, because any free artist had one day or other to pass through the official circuit (e.g. the Museum) or through the parallel circuits (galleries). It is also in this sense that it's hard to speak of underground artists.

There were, of course, some initiatives outside these two circuits, such as the building squatted by a group of artists (Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Bitā Fayyazi...). Their art claimed its rights and the exhibits were a success. In a certain way – since they weren't dependent on the State – the artists offered people a real alternative in familiarizing them with conceptual art and with installations. But, once again, it seems to me that their role took on greater importance by the fact of publicly showing their work, of showing that in Iran other things were being done than religious mural painting and calligraphy. Their role consisted more in continuing to work, in not giving up despite the obstacle course before them.

The advent of the Khatami government changed everything. The country opened the doors a crack to allow exhibits such as the one on the work of Armand Pierre Fernandez, the one on contemporary English sculptors, and the one of the Museum's international collection.

The Museum financed artists' projects, encouraged the Biennials' policy to turn toward the new generation, added to the Biennials' prize a grant to study abroad (most often in France), and organized exhibits entitled "Conceptual Art"

and "New Art". In a word, it gave credit to experimental art.

The Khatami government allowed art to flower, to mature and to follow new courses, by giving financial support and by a certain relaxation in censorship.

In Iran, censorship concerns essentially two things: the naked body, which is completely linked to sexuality; and anything that was – or that by any stretch of the imagination could seem – political. Eight years ago, every exhibit-to-be had to be submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Orientation before being shown. Under the Reformist regime, this law was abolished and artists had a certain freedom of expression. Many works had a political significance, often indirectly, sometimes unwittingly.

We owe to the personality of Sami Azar the vitality pumped into contemporary art and the work of many artists, which would never have seen the light of day without this policy. He allowed the birth of a new generation of artists who explored art forms still little known in Iran and that broke down the partitions between different disciplines. His tenure was the era of reconciliation. Exhibits flourished in official venues and were financed by the government. This sudden interest in contemporary art, however, was not entirely innocent. If the government allowed these initiatives, it was also, somewhere, to better get a hold on this art and make use of it, as if there were a desire to put forward a showcase for the West to show that Iran was on the way to democratization, as if there were a will to change the negative image the world had of Iran.

Honart: an oasis. One of the reasons that pushed me to build this museum

is that artists in Iran really need a neutral place to express themselves, for exchanges, to set their projects up. Artists have no place for that here. Out of nearly a hundred galleries in Tehran, only a few will show experimental projects or artworks, and then often at the artist's expense. It must be taken into account that, if Iranian artists have a hard time getting known, it's also because there are no measures to aid them in their projects – neither financial nor material. Too few artists can live only from their art. I hope they can exhibit in this museum calmly and without restraint. I also hope they can create freely, not caring how they will be seen abroad, without finding themselves in the dead end of having to meet Western expectations by the compulsory treatment of political subjects or the veil or the condition of women. I hope they can concentrate on personal projects.

The museum project also took shape when I realized how cut off from the rest of the world my country was, especially when it came to art. Iranians, after the Revolution, were not kept up-to-date on the latest doings in the art world.

The school system unfortunately does not take over and do its share in moulding the general culture of the young generations. Art studies in the universities are pitiful. The programme is so archaic that no professor still uses it. Since each professor tries to give his students what he deems important, it is hard to speak of a coherent or relevant programme. Those who dare – or who simply know how – to talk about contemporary art are very rare.

The situation has improved these past few years with the advent of the Internet and cable. But on the whole

one may say that Iranians are not familiar with art from the 1970's on, or else very little and confusedly.

What pushed me to put this project into practice is, among other things, the public's thirst for knowledge about this art. The museum, to my mind, must respond to this demand, this curiosity. It must be a carefully selected sampling of what has been done and what is being done so that the Iranian artists and public are no longer isolated, so that they have access to the advances being made in art.

And because, as I have said, art has been in such little esteem, this museum has perhaps a different role from that of other museums, and a more dangerous role. To begin with, we must make an effort not to frighten the public off with exhibits that are too specialized or too theoretical. We must, in the long run, offer basic notions so that people will be receptive to what will be shown to them later on. But we must also accompany the exhibits with caution, with a true mediation between the public and the artworks.

The idea of "exchange and fusion" is, to me, made concrete in the structure of the museum. Three stories: one for the collection, one for international exhibits for which artists will be invited to create on the spot, and one for exhibits of Iranian artists.

On the last two floors of the museum it is also planned – and I am really keen on this – that we present group exhibits for which foreign and Iranian artists will work together.

By Iranian artists, I also mean Iranian artists living abroad. It is very important to me to give them the opportunity to exhibit in their country and to face the Iranian public, insofar

as their works meet the criteria of the censorship.

Their role is paramount abroad because they're free to sing aloud what other artists whisper in Iran. Not that their works are necessarily political.

An annex to the museum is planned: a residence for foreign artists to stay a few months in Tehran to work on the spot in preparation for the exhibit, but also to come and talk about their work, to give workshops and lectures....

I conceive exchange as alive. For the Iranian artists and public it will be very rewarding to meet great contemporary artists, but for the foreign artists it will be equally exciting to come to meet the public and the artists and learn their viewpoints on their work, to observe the way their works are perceived here, and to get to know Iranian artists. All that will be exchange, an overwhelming, sometimes surprising exchange. And, it seems to me, from that exchange fusion will be born. To begin with, Western art will be tamed, or at least not so foreign. Among the artists, it seems to me there will be a movement from curiosity and discovery to syncretism, since they will be led to work together to give birth to an exhibit. This is my vision of fusion

**Otto Piene**  
**Artist, Düsseldorf, Germany.**

Although we are told the world is getting smaller because of modern achievements of light, power and knowledge, the earth and the sky above are still very big.

My first knowledge of the Middle East comes from art history books and museums. I had to teach ancient art history, and I had to prepare myself by reading, looking at pictures and going to museums 50 years ago. I learned

about building materials such as wind, sun-dried bricks and fired bricks – glazed or not – bearing the images of lions and kings.

The image and uses of the ziggurats fascinate me to this day. The reintroduction of ancient forms into contemporary architecture lends dignity to contemporary buildings that otherwise suffer from the overload of engineering and the resulting materials and techniques.

Space – volute and emptiness – appears to be abundant in the Middle East. It invites powerful building where there is genuinely building enthusiasm. "The world's top architects" (according to the New York Times) are to create new cities with extraordinary cultural buildings. Their language of form and content may be uncommon by common standards of known architecture, traditional and contemporary. But is it really new in defining the future of art, architecture and culture?

**David Barrie**  
**Director, The Art Fund,**  
**London, United Kingdom.**

Middle Eastern art has long fascinated UK collectors – and inspired visitors to our museums and galleries. Since our establishment in 1903, The Art Fund has helped UK public art collections acquire over 600 objects from the Middle East, including an Ottoman Velvet Textile for the Ashmolean Museum and star items from the The Kelekian Collection of Islamic Pottery, now on show in the magnificent Jameel Galleries at the V&A Museum.

More recently we have supported contemporary acquisitions either from the Middle East or by artists with strong links to that region. In 2005 we helped the Scottish National Gallery of

Modern Art acquire Mona Hatoum's Slicer – a massively enlarged egg slicer, which is, in fact, human in scale. The themes of vulnerability and entrapment are central to her work and reflect her Palestinian identity.

In turn, many artists from the United Kingdom are looking to notions of British identity, and what that means in terms of our Government's relationship with the Middle East, the recent installation by Mark Wallinger at Tate Britain being a prominent example of such practice. Collecting good examples of contemporary art is a key challenge for museums and galleries everywhere – including the Middle East – and equally important is cross-cultural exchange. We believe passionately that such exchanges will inspire artists and enrich lives in the Middle East and elsewhere – for this reason we are soon launching an International Contemporary Collecting Initiative for UK regional museums.

It is exciting to find that many new galleries are opening up in this region, funded by forward-looking governments and individuals who are keen to support and develop the vibrant artistic communities that have emerged over the past few years. Such individual and institutional patronage of the arts in the Middle East is extremely promising. The world of contemporary art will, no doubt, be much enriched by the initiatives such as the DIFC Gulf Art Fair – ideally placed to reflect the achievements not only of artists in the Middle East but also of those from the rest of the world.



**Alireza Sami Azar PhD**

**Professor of Art and  
Architecture, Former  
Director of the Tehran  
Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Tehran, Iran.**

Looking into the recent developments in the cultural scene of the Middle East, it appears that a basic change in the social and cultural role of art is underway. The identification of driving forces behind this historical development, which can be highlighted as follows, is crucial to a discussion of major transformations that are happening in the region. It will also shed light on our analysis of Middle Eastern art in the decade to come.

1. The breakdown of the universality fostered by modernism both in its form and definition of art, giving way to others including non-Western cultures. This is a notion which appeared with post-modern multiculturalism, initially pointing out racial and ethnic otherness in terms of marginal groups that have long been left out, and now extending into other regional cultures such as the Middle Eastern. In this changing attitude, art seems to reveal itself not to be of universal significance, but proves to be a concept differing according to society and culture. This provides a great chance for non-Western cultures to create a local canon and thus become a forum for regional participation as well as international interactions.

2. The rise of contemporary art as a claim for independent modernity and cultural identity, against the global art canon, and also as a public medium in places where art is controlled by local politics. This is largely manifested by

applying new media as a more fashionable means of great potentials to express views. After a long period of creating modern abstract canvases, the unquestionable power of new media in creating issue-based art, has made art a political tool and magnified its significant role in social reform. The multiform presence of contemporary art, extending from painting and sculpture to video and installation, lend itself more easily to perform political views and involve the general audience.

3. The substantial economic boom in the region that together with the appearance of new metropolises like Dubai, alongside the old capitals, promises an expansion of cultural infrastructure in terms of numerous private galleries, museums and art institutions being added to the existing places. This has created a new cultural environment in which art can play a major role in the public domain. The new landscape of art institutions, involving increasing numbers of biennials, art schools and branches of major museums, is in response to the growing interest in art, whether as a cultural commodity or a social requirement of modern life. With the help of curatorial enterprises, cutting edge architecture, and public relations campaigns, these institutions claim a significant contribution of art to the urban economy and socio-political development.

Shading into the debates on the sustainability of cultural development, the emerging art scene of the Middle East seems to be challenged by a number of compelling forces largely arising out of an unbalanced situation of the State and private funding. A case in point is Iran, where all major museums and art venues are controlled by the state, which evidently

uses them to dictate its policy, while private initiatives and art societies practically lack any financial and executive power to implement their objectives.

**Kamran Diba**

**Founder, Tehran Museum,  
Architect, Collector, Art  
Adviser, Paris, France.**

It is only the natural growth of cultural globalization and regional modernisation which will bring about a viable artistic environment in the Middle East. Related individual countries need not look singularly to the West. A regional artistic activity is a prerequisite to an emerging artistically productive region. Dubai as an art venue is already starting to play a decisive role in such integration; a marketplace where the regional and international world meet. If local conflicts in the region are contained or resolved, with the right policies and leadership, Dubai has the potential to become the artistic capital of the region.

Since I treat the interviews I do as part of my oeuvre, I should have included in the enumeration to which you cite as referring to interviews in my videos; in addition to my interview with a schizophrenic in *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*, I have also interviewed.

## Global Art Forum Timetable

### Programme Wednesday, 7 March 2007

**Art & Dubai thinktank** (*by invitation only*)

**10.30 – 12.00**

#### Artist Focus

##### — Artist interviews/presentations

**2.30–3.00** *Otto Piene*, Artist, Düsseldorf, DE with Maria Finders, Conference Curator, Director, Europe, Brunswick Arts, Paris, FR.

**3.00–3.30** *Kader Attia*, Artist, Paris, FR with Jerome Sans, Director of Programme, Baltic, Gateshead, UK.

**3.30–4.00** *Jan Fabre*, Artist, Brussels, BL with *Michelle Nicol*, Curator, Co-Founder, glamour engineering, Zurich, CH.

**4.00–4.30** *Lara Baladi*, Artist, Cairo with Beth Derbyshire, Artist, UK.

**4.30–5.00** *Wim Delvoye*, Artist, Brussels, BL with Vasif Kortun, Director, Platform Garanti, Istanbul, TR.

#### Working with artists

##### — Collectors, art consultants and philanthropists

**5.00–5.30** *Judith Greer*, Art Collector, London, UK. *Mon Mullerschoen*, Art Consultant, Munich, DE. *Charles Asprey*, Curator and collector, Charles Asprey Award for Palestinian Art. Moderator *Maria Finders*, Conference Curator, Director, Europe, Brunswick Arts, Paris, FR.

##### — The Serpentine Gallery as a laboratory

**5.30–6.30** *Julia Peyton-Jones*, Director, Serpentine Gallery, London *Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Serpentine Gallery, Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects, London, UK.

### Programme Thursday, 8 March 2007

#### Middle East Focus

##### — The next ten years of contemporary art in the Middle East

**10.30–12.00** *Jack Persekian*, Artistic Director, Sharjah Biennial, Curator, Founder and Director of Anadiel Gallery and Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem. *Camilla Cañellas*, International Arts Consultant, Writer and Critic Barcelona, ES. *Tirdad Zolghadr*, Curator, Zurich, CH. *Hassan Khan*, Editor, Bidoun, Cairo, EG. *Bassam El-Baroni*, Art Critic, Curator, EG. *Saleh Barakat*, Art Expert, Beirut, LB. Moderator *Vasif Kortun*, Curator, Director, Platform Garanti, Istanbul, TR.

##### — Open stage for the Middle East and South Asia

**2.30–3.30** Sharjah Biennial 8

**3.30–4.00** *Jitish Kallat*, Artist, Mumbai, IN, and *Anita Dube*, Artist, New Delhi, IN, with *Savita Apte*, Curator, Writer, Head of Education, DIFC Gulf Art Fair.

**4.00–4.30** *Solmaz Shabazi*, Artist, Tehran, Iran, and Berlin, DE, with *Daniel Birnbaum*, Director of the Städelschule Art Academy and Portikus Gallery, Frankfurt, DE.

**4.30–5.00** *Kamran Diba*, Founder, Tehran Museum, Architect, Collector, Art Adviser, FR & ES with *Ebrahim Melamed*, Collector, Tehran, Iran.

**5.00–5.30** *Platform Garanti*, Istanbul, Turkey.

**5.30–6.00** *Asma M'Naouar*, Artist, Tunis, Tunisia.

**6.00–6.30** *Hassan Khan*, Editor, Bidoun, Cairo, EG with *Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Serpentine Gallery, Co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects, London, UK.

## Programme Friday, 9 March 2007

### Art Cities Focus

#### — Branding cities through culture

**10.30–12.00** *David Barrie*, Director, The Art Fund, London, UK. *Lisa Ball-Lechgar*, Editor, Canvas, Cultural Consultant, Dubai, UAE. *Jean-Hubert Martin*, Curator, Direction des Musées de France, Paris, FR. *Donna De Salvo*, Chief Curator and Associate Director for Programs, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA. *Yolla Naujaim*, Collector, Beirut, LB. *Jan Dalley*, Arts Editor, The Financial Times, London, UK. *Andrée Sfeir-Semler*, Director Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg, DE and Beirut, LB. *Jill Silverman*, Partner, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, FR. *Otto Piene*, Artist, Düsseldorf, DE. Moderator *Daniel Birnbaum*, Director of the Städelshule Art Academy and Portikus Gallery, Frankfurt, DE.

#### — Building future art cities

**2.30–3.15** *Nadim Karam*, Artist and Architect, Beirut, LB. *Andreas Angelidakis*, Architecture and Digital Design, Athens, GR. *Langlands & Bell*, Architects and Designers, London, UK.

#### — World art cities

**3.15–4.30** Beijing: *Lance Fung*, Curator, Art dealer, Artistic Director, SITE Santa Fe 2008, New York, USA. Cairo: *William Wells*, Director, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt. Paris: *Jerome Sans*, Director of Program, Baltic, Gateshead, UK. New York: *Bob Monk*, Director, Gagosian Gallery, New York, USA. Moderator *Maria Finders*, Conference Curator, Director, Europe, Brunswick Arts, Paris, FR.

## Global Art Forum thinktank

Wednesday, 7 March 2007

– 10.30 Thinktank breakfast Atrium, DIFC Building

– Notes taken by Maria Finders and Alexandra Zafiriou

### Table 1

*Martin Parr*, Photographer, Australia. *Mark Von Huisseling*, Journalist, Zurich, Switzerland. *Michelle Nicol*, Co-director, Glamour Engineering, Zurich, Switzerland. *Lance Fung*, Curator, SITE Santa Fe, USA. *Patricia Palmer*, Artistic Director, Artworks, Dubai, UAE. *Mon Mullerschoen*, Art Consultant, Munich Germany. *Beth Derbyshire*, Artist, London, United Kingdom. *Katuar Bhaksar*, Painter, New York, USA. *Janet Bhavsar*, Artist, New York, USA.

### Table 2

*Roxana Azimi*, Journalist, Journal Des Arts, France. *Isabelle de Wavrin*, Journalist, Beaux-Arts Magazine, France. *Jack Persekian*, Sharjah Biennial, Jerusalem. *Anita Dube*, Artist, New Delhi, India. *Marcus Fraser*, Islamic Art Consultant, Australia. *Jitish Kallat*, Artist, Mumbai, India. *Savita Apte*, Art Historian, Mumbai, India. *Asma M'Naouar*, Artist, Tunis, Tunisia. *Fred Eversley*, Sculptor, New York, USA. *Jinsu So*, Economist, Seoul, Korea.

### Table 3

*Seagite Tieleal*, Publisher, Art India, Mumbai, India. *Subdodh Kenkar*, Installation Artist, India. *Partha Chowdlivey*, Business Manager, Art India, Mumbai, India. *Andreuz Petterson*, andreuzattach2.com. *Pierre Valentin*, Art Lawyer, London, United Kingdom. *Khabil Abdulkwahid*, Artist, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. *Sonia Brewin*, Artist, Painter, The Prince's Drawing School, Dubai, UAE. *Rachel Spencer*, General Manager, Artworks, London, United Kingdom. *Abhay Sardesai*, Editor, Art India, Writer, Mumbai, India. *Otto Piene*, Artist, Düsseldorf, Germany.



Table 4

*Judith Greer*, Art Collector, London, United Kingdom. *Wim Delvoy*, Artist, Belgium. *William Wells*, Director, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt. *Tirdad Zolghadar*, Curator, Berlin, Germany. *Jan Dalley*, Arts Editor, The Financial Times, London, United Kingdom. *Lisa Ball-Lechgar*, Editor, Canvas Magazine, Dubai, UAE. *Kader Attia*, Artist, Paris, France. *Lara Baladi*, Artist, Cairo, Egypt. *Asma M'Naouar*, Artist, Tunis, Tunisia. *Solmaz Shahbazi*, Artist, Tehran, Iran, and Berlin, Germany. *Saleh Barakat*, Art Expert, Beirut, Lebanon. *Camilla Cañellas*, Writer, Critic, Curator, Barcelona, Spain. *Bassam El-Baroni*, Art Critic, Curator, Egypt. *Hassan Khan*, Editor, Bidoun, Cairo, Egypt. *Jerome Sans*, Director of Programs, Baltic, Gateshead, United Kingdom. *Charles Asprey*, Curator and Collector, Charles Asprey Award for Palestinian Art, London, United Kingdom.

## Question 1

What defines a cultural capital?

Is it about numbers?

Is it the number of institutions?

Number of artists?

Number of sponsors?

Table 1

- Long-term project.
- Local people have something to do – only 10% of the population in Dubai are local.
- Dubai is a new city, which needs to grow.
- For a cultural capital everyone must feel they have some sort of stake.
- Example: Soho/ Berlin rich cultural mix and that we need to create similar conditions.

Table 2

- You have to move artists, sponsors, media attention – plus a critical mass that you need to check, a cultural city – you need all the elements. However critical mass really needs to feed society. So everything is needed.

Table 3

- A cultural capital as a process – as encompassing it as a web – the idea of a geopolitical centre.
- Expressive Arts have to interact – arts, theatre, literature, music, cinema, technology need to have a conversation.
- There needs to be justice to the best local talent.
- Public Art Initiatives and Institutions.

Table 4

- Place as a destination to meet a new culture – How it happens?
- EPM = Education + Production + Mobility.
- More investment in Arab education, university, exhibition space, current representations – curators – funding for artists to travel and exchange i.e. to get artists from around the world.
- Libraries & Arts Management – Arts management courses – training curators, people, institutions.
- Acquired art works – building a museum, which will be a reflection of what is happening.
- A cultural capital must allow that artists can travel and works can travel.
- Artists from around the world need to come to Dubai.
- A fund to get artists to come to Dubai for residence programme.

## Question 2

On first sight, what are the keys assets that Dubai has in supporting the process of becoming a cultural capital?

### Table 1

- 7 hrs from Beijing, 7 hrs from London.
- Location + climate + energy, which is fast moving i.e. to build a programme.
- Things can happen very fast.
- Enormous money + investment = sustainability

### Table 2

- Money is very important – there is so much money.
- The light + the space is a good thing – (Hollywood, LA example, where until the 60's and 70's it had similar natural aspects, with money and glamour) was a critical desert – but natural aspects are true. There was no infrastructure – could be positive if you plan it properly.
- The newness of the place – you don't have hundreds of years of history.
- The political will is very important – it is essential, is the key = DIFC is an example of this.

### Table 3

- A certain desire to be open, vulnerable to change – so much money + infrastructure.
- Unacknowledged cosmopolitan – justice to the build up.
- Challenges – the capacity to allow content to surface i.e. local artists. This could be used as a resource – this doing justice to the country.
- Policymaking is a must.

### Table 4

- Example: California is a classic example of what is happening because of education – Because of the university – John Baldassari.
- UK Michael Craig Martin.

### Question 3

On first sight, what are the challenges that Dubai could face in this process?

### Table 1

- The lack of arts institutions.
- The cultural climate e.g. censorship, nudity.
- There is a challenge re expanding the artistic world.
- The lack of public institutions.
- The lack of arts education.
- No long tradition.
- Example: However Beijing vs. long-term tradition that they have.

### Table 2

- As to our answers, Question 1.

### Table 3

- Speed up – everything seems to be evolution of art initiatives, where it is organic.
- The possibility of having various centres where activities happen at the one time.
- Produced in the nation, local artists etc.
- How one should base the entire process – is it necessary to happen in an organic way.
- Another important challenge is to have a variety of centres instead of one centre – Pompidou by disciplines.
- Interest in a confliction way.

### Table 4

Identify how important is freedom of expression, Identify politics and liberty of expression.  
Dubai is a tabula rasa.

Question 4

What could be the five scenarios, which could emerge from this process? i.e. One scenario could be that Dubai creates a major art institution like Tate Modern or Centre Georges Pompidou, that combine both the exhibition, educational and social elements. Or i.e. another scenario could be that Dubai creates an institute for Art and Business. The MFA is the new MBS?

Table 1

Solutions – Scenarios.

- Funding for the artist – art schools, primary and secondary level, art academies.
- Funding for art galleries.
- Private Sponsorship.
- Who will do it – outside teachers and professionals/ professors should be brought in.
- International Board of Advisors as to how the actions should be carried out.
- Diversity of the local competition – pride in local culture – buying outside is not a solution, local stake.
- To build local pride and build up knowledge of their own culture as opposed to importing culture.
- How wealth is used? Wealth is not the most important – depends how it’s used. It is not necessarily the richest countries that have culture.
- Examples of Emirates Airline funding Arsenal in the UK so there is funding – how it is dispersed etc.
- Presence of a museum in Dubai

Table 2

Scenario.

- Dubai must do something different to other regions in terms of culture – while museums create a dynamic – rather than buying in from the outside. The dynamic is interesting, however it should attempt to grow its own.
- Sustainability – future – grass roots – aspect to it. Sustainable cultural city has to have grass roots – which is going to maintain it.

Table 3

As per answers Question 3.

Table 4

- In addition to the above, answers Question 1.
- Grants programmes – Art moves Africa.
- The ability for artists and curators to talk.



.....  
Artist Focus

## Artist interviews/presentations

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2.30–3.00

Kader Attia, Artist, Paris, FR. with Jerome Sans,  
Director of Program, Baltic, Gateshead, UK.

Maria Finders

Good afternoon. We are about to start with Jerome Sans and Kadar Attia. This is the first year we are doing this in Dubai; it's a new Global Art Forum, and this is the very first session. This afternoon we are going to have many different artists presenting their work and their commentaries, and as we go on during the day, we are also going to be talking about collecting and about different aspects of how artists' work gets produced. We are going to end today with a conversation between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julia Peyton-Jones about the model of the Serpentine Gallery.

This morning we are with Jerome Sans who is a curator and the Director of

Programmes at the Baltic. Jerome was running the Palais De Tokyo for many years, and he has over 20 years of experience as an international curator working with a number of the world's most influential and innovative artists. With him is Kader Attia, who is a very young artist living in Paris. Kader is from Algeria, but he grew up in France. Kader is going to present some work and then Jerome, as a curator, is going to ask him a number of questions about his work. I'll let you start.

#### Jerome Sans

Thank you so much for inviting all of us here. Who would have imagined ten years ago that we would be here today all together from around the world, celebrating the first art fair in Dubai? Who would have imagined ten years ago that the market would have changed so much? Who would have imagined ten years ago that our Western model would somehow hinder the progress by receding back into a standard system of practices? Who would have imagined ten years ago that my friend Kader would have had the possibility to exist as an artist, especially in my country, France? He is a second generation Algerian, and before him there was no history of any Algerian artists, Algerian Galleries, Algerian curators, Algerian critics, Algerian collectors; no one from his world would have had the chance. And by chance the world has changed completely from a geographical perspective and we are now entering into a global consideration, where we can be together here and overlook our cultural differences.

I am really excited because this is a new challenge for all of us. We can see that the idea of what was considered to be an "art centre" is shifting. Regardless of where we are based, every day we have to be sure of what we do. We must work twice as hard because nothing is secure any more. There are more possibilities for this kind of dialogue in new places in the world like Dubai today, and for me, this conversation with Kader is a good way to start.

I am really happy to speak with Kader today since I discovered his work in a very funny way. Like many of my colleagues, I take part in many juries, and this particular time it was for a photography competition in Paris. There were hundreds of dossiers that all

looked the same, all made by computers, all very generic. There was just one person really stood out. His dossier was a box explaining his own story, his own personal life and his own world with amazing, very amateurish but very beautiful photos inside it. We asked three different juries of the competition and we were all impressed by this guy coming from the suburbs of Paris. He had no real background but was presenting the most political, most original dossier at a time when every dossier I saw from every artist, from every gallery, looked the same.

When I started in the art world, every time I met an artist, or went to a gallery, or met a curator, the way they explained the work of an artist was very personal, and I was fascinated by the way Kader presented his work. He has made a new piece called La Piste, I believe, where for three years he followed the lives and transitions of a number of transvestite Arabs in Paris. He shot them, lived with them and made a very beautiful series of photos shown as a slide piece. He is slowly but surely seducing the entire art world in Paris and over the last three years became one of the best-known living French artists and is now internationally renowned. I'm really happy to be here today and to have a look at his work. (Slide) This is another piece he did in Paris at his gallery, Galerie Kamel Mennour, a few years ago. The gallery is in Saint Germain. This is a very bourgeois neighbourhood, old fashioned, still known for its fame in the Fifties, and there is no real excitement there today. Kader transformed the gallery into a Halal store and made a brand called Halal with Halal clothing, which made the gallery look just like a normal street wear clothing shop.

#### Kader Attia

Let me explain how the Halal project was born. Actually, I was thinking about something that could be a fantasy for the young people of my neighbourhood in the working-class suburbs of Paris, which involved both the fantasy of being part of the consumer society with all these famous brands like Adidas and Nike and, at the same time, trying to stay a good Muslim. It is very interesting to be here in Dubai and to explain this project because while a lot of people know what Halal means, for me, it's very strong to be here in Dubai and to present this project because it makes sense.

The other part of the project explored how you can create a brand of clothing with a ridiculous name and to take this a step further, creating clothes under that brand that no one could actually buy. I was working with a very good gallery and we decided to do this show together. It was funny because we transformed the gallery into a typical clothing store for young teenagers of the suburbs. The Parisian suburb is divided into the bourgeois west and the working-class suburbs, where you just don't go. The idea was to show something very different, pretty tough because as some of you might know in France there is a big difference between the city and the suburb and all the working class living in the suburb don't go to St Germain. The idea was how to show, how to build a real project as if it were a real shop, and when all the people came inside the shop they wanted to buy a tee shirt, jeans or whatever and when they went to the cashier, the cashier says, "Oh no, it's not for sale, it's art." Then it was very interesting to see the reactions of the people who asked, "What do you mean by art?" For example, one day the chairman of a big company like Nike came into the gallery and he thought that it was a real shop. Then he called me on the phone and he told me that he wanted to buy the license of Halal in order to sell all these clothes in the Arab and Muslim world. And I said, "It's not for sale, it's not for sale because it's art." "It's art, what do you mean by art? People can earn a lot of money with this?" I said, "It's not my purpose". My idea is to show that as an artist you can invent a new way of getting noticed in the art world. I actually bought the name Halal, so no one else could create clothes under that name. If someone wants to use the name, they have to call me because I have the copyright.

#### Jerome Sans

The very interesting thing is that as an artist, you started first as an art project: a real bar in a very middle-class neighbourhood in Paris, which became amazingly trendy. The mixture of people in this area varied from middle-class people, fashionable people, music people and artists. How do you see your move to more classic art works after these kinds of pieces?

#### Kader Attia

I think that what is interesting in art is not to be too introverted. You can find, for example, this work (slide) is very interesting because La Piste d'atterrissage (The landing strip) was a slide show I did with an Algerian transvestite community in Paris. But I wanted to involve myself in something stronger, not only to take pictures. So I worked on a project with an association to help older transvestites to "gain" their identities.

#### Jerome Sans

Then you made a very sensitive piece, which was first shown in New York recently: the cage with the little children and pigeons like a Hitchcock movie. Can we go to Flying Rats please?

#### Kader Attia

(slide) Yes. I did the piece at the Lyon Biennale. It's about fifty sculptures about kids and their lifestyles. The bodies of these kids are made with a kind of dough of corn mixed with flour. Around them I built a courtyard, like a playground, and then in this space I have one hundred and fifty live pigeons, which were hidden during the building of the sculpture. In the beginning, the piece was, as you can imagine, totally clean. After one month, two, three, with the pigeons allowed to fly freely, it became very tough, dirty and apocalyptic. A lot of people ask me, how I could imagine such a project? Sometimes I don't know. I think I was probably traumatized when I was a child by my parents, but actually I don't think it is the only thing that was my inspiration for this piece.

#### Jerome Sans

Often, in the works we saw earlier in the slide show, we see references to your origins or religion. Is this something you want to envisage?

#### Kader Attia

Excuse me. This project was shown in the Jewish Synagogue in Paris. I try to imagine how the history between Muslims and Jews could be compared to the story about the beginning of the universe, the big bang. In a sort of play, I used a huge ball or moon in one part and the Star of David in another part, and I put on the piece in a huge courtyard.

### Jerome Sans

It was like a disco ball. In fact, in some there were versions of the project where all the stars, all the moons.... all of us moving around like this on the floor, everywhere.... so a mixture of the impossible for once mixed in a beautiful environment. This is a picture in New York (*slide*).

### Kader Attia

Actually, I've never shown this piece. This was in my studio in New York. It's a talk; for the past two years I have started to talk about political subjects. For example, I pose women in a praying position, wrap them with aluminium foil and then I cast their bodies. The idea is to play with the fullness and the emptiness.

(*Slide*) This is a project that I have just shown in the Canary Islands. The Canary Islands are a kind of sanatorium just in front of Africa and actually you might know that now the Canary Islands are the main immigration destination for Africans. So I imagined a project on the beach, with miles of two metals, white and iron. When you come to the beach from the sea, you would see the beach as something shiny and very poetic. Maybe I'm optimistic. I am sure that sometimes a political project could be poetic. This means that at the same time you can be poetic and talk about politics. These are the kinds of projects I have.

### Jerome Sans

Can I ask how you see the future of Arab countries and the Middle East art situation? In my mind it looks like we are at the beginning of a new era, and I have a feeling it's going to move faster than we think. Things will be returning quickly to something quite different. What do you think?

### Kader Attia

I think that we are at the beginning of something and it's obvious that when you begin something it's difficult to start, to be the first one. I think that today, for me, it is very important to come here to Dubai because I am sure that in the future, Arab artwork will be more influential, and Chinese art and Indian art. If you think about it, fifteen years ago nobody would have considered China or India as places for contemporary art, and now actually they

have the most important and interesting art scenes. So I am very confident about the future of the Arab art world.

(*Video – installation of crude oil pouring on a piece of sugar*)

This piece is about sugar and oil.

### Jerome Sans

Does anyone have any questions?

### Audience

What is the concept behind this work?

### Kader Attia

This work is totally new, so it's difficult for me to talk about it, and I think it's difficult to talk about your work when you are the artist. That's why we need critics and curators. It's a white cube of sugar which has drunk too much oil.

You could read many things into this piece, but the metaphor is quite clear; it could be the block with oil; the white sugar could mean something, it could be black; white sugar becoming a black box; there are numerous meanings.

It relates to my hope for the Arab art world. I think that we have to be aware that we have to avoid censorship in our culture. Art is an amazing world where freedom is what counts, and if you are in the US or Europe we have to try and avoid censorships.

The art world is maybe the only place where freedom can still exist and this is why many other artists have moved towards the feel of the music, the cinema, design or wherever, but it's all really a platform where everything is possible. Thank you very much, and have a nice day and nice time here.



3.30–4.00

Jan Fabre, Artist, Brussels, BL. with  
Michelle Nicol, Curator, Co-Founder,  
Glamour Engineering, Zurich, CH.

Maria Finders

Ongoing with our “talk show” today, we have another artist that’s going to be talking with a curator: Michelle Nicol and Jan Fabre. Jan Fabre comes from Belgium. He’s not going to show us any slides because he doesn’t have to. Jan is working in many environments including, from what I found out recently, the palace of the Queen of Belgium, doing radical works there. Michelle Nicol comes from Zurich. She’s not only a curator but she runs an agency called Glamour Engineering, which brings art together with very commercial projects. Michelle also did a show recently that was about art and fashion, which was an amazing event bringing artists together working in the fashion world. I’d like Michelle to take it away.

Michelle Nicol

Thank you very much. First of all, thank you for the invitation. It’s very exciting to be here in Dubai during these times of total change as Jerome was pointing out earlier on. I’m very happy to be here with Jan Fabre, a world reknown artist based in Antwerp. That’s actually good because I will confess that I’m not totally intimate with the work of Jan Fabre. Actually, we met in person this afternoon, so I will be asking a series of very naïve questions and hope to come closer to the work.

Maybe to begin, I will cite some of the things that I think I know of your work, after having a deep conversation this afternoon. You’re inspired by Flemish painters. There is an obsession with the body, inside and outside; you work with insects. I think this is something that is very well known. You are currently working on a laboratory where you are inviting artist friends to contribute work; you have a theatre company for which you write pieces and direct the pieces and they tour all over the world. You are very active in performance, which is something you started in the seventies and actually stopped for a while and reignited this work recently. There was this performance recently with Marina Abramovic at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. You were also active in films, not working with video, but exclusively with films. One of my favourites is the film you did with Ilya Kabakov, where he was a fly and you were a golden beetle. Also, as far as I know, you are also politically involved. Is that more or less right?

Jan Fabre

Some things are right, yes. I will begin by talking about my laboratory, which I founded in the last four or five years. It’s a laboratory that does research about the body and the voice. I work there in the building with actors, dancers, scientists, philosophers. Way back more than thirty years ago, my basic world was always around the body, to research the body in a social way, in a political way, in a philosophical way, so the body is a kind of laboratory in a sense. I built this building as a body where I research the most sexual parts of our body: the brain, body fluids, the skeleton, muscles, and lots of different things in a project of the senses. Another project I am developing is to shoot a movie in Boston

with Edward Wilson, one of my heroes, because scientists are really my heroes. Edward Wilson is the writer of the famous book, *The Unity of Knowledge*, discussing the idea of consilience. I always considered myself to be an artist of consilience. I always use different disciplines by studying anthropology or biology or the behaviour of insects in comparison with the behaviour of human beings and finding links. These links form an interpretation towards, movement towards the study of anthropology. And one of these scientists, Edward Wilson, wrote this fantastic book that introduced the tool of consilience, and so my new project is making a movie with Wilson and talking about the relationship between our “designs”.

#### Michelle Nicol

Can you maybe explain a little bit closer about what you understand as an artist of consilience?

#### Jan Fabre

What I mean by consilience is, in the late seventies and in the middle of the eighties, I was doing performances. I was with a lot of English festivals, which for me, was almost like a garbage can of people who didn't know enough about the history of art or didn't know enough about the history of acting, or the history of dancing because all the schools have a kind of different memory, different techniques and a different approach. What I mean in terms of consilience is, in a sense, putting things together so that they agree: that you need to study the field of anthropology to make a comparison of the study of the human kind, how humans behave. By studying entomology, the way insects move, their kinetic intelligence, the way that they move in space, the way they conquer space, you look to the way humans do this. Next, you can find links, and by these links you can give a new interpretation to things. It's something else than just multimedia, just to pile up different techniques of media, just piling up without knowing what the content means and consilience is a tool of content.

#### Michelle Nicol

You told me, or actually it's well known, that you already had a laboratory in your parents' garden when you first started out as an artist. What were you doing exactly in this laboratory?

#### Jan Fabre

This was in '78 and '79, and I had a tent that was made in the shape of two noses. In this small tent there was a small table, pen and paper and I was like a Doctor Frankenstein, creating new life, in a sense, creating metaphors. I used to cut out the flies' wings and put these on the bodies of worms that I had picked up in the garden – creating new life. These metaphors were all based on the idea of smell, because to me good art has to stink, so this was research about smelling.

#### Michelle Nicol

That's something I've always been fascinated by – the work you do with insects. There has been a recent commission that Maria Finders just spoke about for the Brussels Royal Palace, which was commissioned by Queen Paola of Belgium. Can you explain what this work looks like and how it functions? It's actually a ceiling.

#### Jan Fabre

It's a permanent ceiling I made, so when she became Queen, she wanted to make the palace open to beauty, to art. And there was one ceiling that was never painted. It was a ceiling of the Belgian Congo, because of course we Belgians know what we did was quite wrong in the Belgian Congo. This was never painted, so she commissioned me to do this. I took a year and a half to make some models. I did some drawings and then I figured out I wanted to make a kind of new skin with the shells of the jewel beetle, and it was almost like it made a painting of lights. I used one million and a half skeletons, the skin of the jewel beetle and I made a mosaic with drones inside skulls of humans with giraffe legs, flying fishes, also a lot of references to the political situation with the way Belgium acted out in the Belgian Congo. The work is quite beautiful, I think. The Queen opens the palace every year now in July for three or four weeks so people can see this. And for me it was very important to do this work, to accept this commission, because as you know Belgium has a Flemish speaking side, and when I accepted this invitation it was almost a political statement. By working for the Queen of Belgium, I got bags of negative letters. They even tried to kill me. The Flemish extreme right in the Flemish organisation, because the Flemish

extreme right, the fascists, are very strong, and by accepting Belgium means, I'm not accepting the Flemish as an independent country and that's something I like. So it was a big riot just to execute the work. The work is very much a part, in the political dimension, of the Belgian history. It was really like me saying, I like Belgium, I like the Queen and I'm not an extreme right-wing nationalist.

#### Michelle Nicol

As an artist you are very politically aware. Do you see your artistic work also in a political dimension or do you think that artists' work should be able to change society or take influence in society?

#### Jan Fabre

I was never busy with political art. By researching the body and looking at humankind, the human body changes in a sense. In my work I tried to defend the vulnerability of this human body. We are living in a society where a body doesn't sweat, it doesn't smell anymore, even sports people and fashion models. Some sculptures I developed, some angels and monks I developed, are spiritual bodies, in a sense. I made sculptures with human bones, so the kind of outer skeleton was like a scarab. Imagine that the future body has an outer skeleton. We cannot have wounds any more, we cannot cut ourselves any more. That means in Western society, we have moved away from the stigmata of Christ because we still believe mentally and physically we are still living with the image of Christ. We are still under the power and control of religion, so the futuristic bodies I designed as sculptures, in a sense, you could say they are political statements because it's defending humankind and the belief that humankind can survive with material from its own body. In my work, it's a refusal of the biotechnology of the body, which has become robotic. All the material I have used has come from the human body. So in that sense, yes. But it's not political art like a contemporary young artist sees it.

#### Michelle Nicol

But to be political can also mean to have content that reaches out to more people than just an elite part of society, which are people interested in contemporary art. With your theatre company for example, where you write the pieces and you direct the pieces, you definitely connect your content to more people than just the art world people. How important or what kind of position does this work hold inside your overall work?

#### Jan Fabre

It's important because I'm working with people. It's an exchange of energy; an exchange of ideas and of course what I like about it today, what I also like about performance, is the economic value is not there. You perform a theatre piece, and after two hours it doesn't have an economic value anymore. It was very beautiful. In the art world you get the sculpture, the object, a drawing still able to produce tears. Working and writing for people is important as is, of course, the live aspect of receiving in the space, in the theatre or in the arts, receiving the immediate reaction of the public. How they react, how they shout or they become quiet, how they love it or don't love it. I love the smell and the sweat and the tears of my actors because I respect them. It's a daily exercise. To research the body, I develop mental techniques and guidelines about biological acting, so I teach my company. It's an ongoing process. I'm contemporalistic in a sense because I like to do it. I love to do it. It's more like a jazz musician, you know. He takes his trumpet and he blows and he researches the music. For me it's making drawings, writings, researching, having scientists working with my dancers and actors. It's an ongoing process. It's consilience because I'm learning from the intelligence of kinetic intelligence, the brain intelligence of my actors and dancers for my sculptures, and I learn from my sculptures too in my writing to educate my actors and dancers in a different way.

#### Michelle Nicol

You developed a method called "biological state of acting". Can you explain what this is?

### Jan Fabre

It is being aware as a performer that you have organs and that you have a system in your body that governs the emotions or is triggered by the reactions inside of your organs, and this awareness is knowledge as a performer. If you have this and are much more aware of what's happening inside of you, that means you can go much further, from being to acting, to making this bridge and, of course, you train this through different exercises.

### Michelle Nicol

What kind of exercises, for example?

### Jan Fabre

Simple exercises. It's an exercise of carrying each other for one hour until the fat comes in the muscles. The hard bumps, the quicker the blood flows. By experiencing this, how do you deal with this, what do you do, you make this bigger. As an actor you reduce this, so this is one of the simple acting methods.

### Michelle Nicol

Don't you think it could be interesting to work with these methods for Hollywood, for example? For a more commercial film project?

### Jan Fabre

No, because this training takes about five or six years minimum. In my company, before they get the title of "warrior of beauty", it takes five or six years of daily training. A lot of these actors come to audition. Many are working in film or in Hollywood or in London or in Paris and most of the time they don't even pass the audition because they are trained in a different way. They are trained on the effects and the outside effects, and my work is really based on the regulation of the inside.

### Michelle Nicol

But don't you think it could be something that would be interesting for more people to witness specifically as film as a medium, which can be or which is consumed by many people? There is a lot of this talk about art being the new lead culture and more and more people being interested in contemporary art.

In fact, the Gulf Art Fair is definitely a phenomenon which comes out of the rise of these new entertainment platforms. Another question, what is your take on this development on art?

### Jan Fabre

I think entertainment and art are two different things, like fashion and art. They are two different things because they have another way of approaching things, another way of living, another way of thinking. I believe in the intimacy and the intensity for visual arts over the years. The moment when I'm writing or moving with twenty or thirty actors and dancers on the stage, you talk and you direct in a different way. For that reason you do what you have to. Entertainment is another matter, and I respect this.

### Michelle Nicol

Collaborations, or one of the other collaborations that you have in the laboratory and that you're currently working on, are artist friends' contributions. Can you tell us a little bit about how these collaborations work?

### Jan Fabre

It's simple. I have this building. This building is now renovated and I invited, for example, Peter Sloterdijk and other writers to join me. It's a research laboratory and they all made something for me with the idea of researching the body and the voice.

### Michelle Nicol

And how should we imagine the building? Is this a building one lives in still or is it a kind of exhibition space?

### Jan Fabre

No, no it has been a research building for artists for four years. We try to produce young artists, performing artists, visual artists who can show their work. We try to support them with money and invite people. It's also in a very poor neighbourhood, where I was born. We try to involve the neighbourhood without being social, because I'm not a social artist. We try to involve the neighbourhood, to work and live with it. The neighbourhood changed in that sense. A lot of young artists came to work with



me, and they started buying small buildings. It was cheap, so in that sense it was also good that this building was there, this laboratory.

**Michelle Nicol**

Which is also a kind of political activity in a way?

**Jan Fabre**

Except, again, I don't think about these things. It's something organic, not so politically correct.

**Michelle Nicol**

Can one visit you in this building when one is in Antwerp?

**Jan Fabre**

Yes, of course. I work there often.

**Michelle Nicol**

Thank you.

.....  
4.00–4.30

**Lara Baladi, Artist, Cairo, EG. with  
Beth Derbyshire, Artist, London, UK.**

Maria Finders

After this great conversation between Jan and Michelle, we are now going to have a discussion with two artists who are very present here in Dubai this week: Lara Baladi from Cairo and Beth Derbyshire from London. What we're going to do is talk a bit about the work of both Lara and Beth and then, if we have time, have a short conversation.

**Beth Derbyshire**

I want to begin with a project that I did in 2005, which introduces to you a little about my work. I'm somebody that's interested in the notion of communication and I work a lot with messaging. This project is called Message. It was a commission for Remembrance Day in which we sent a message across the city of London using forty war veterans.

*Next slide.* This shows the locations and what I really wanted to do. It felt appropriate, considering the piece that I'm doing here, to illustrate my interest in the city as a site and placing work in the public realm.

*Next slide.* The message began at the Royal Observatory, and it went up the city of London and it was communicated by

semaphore, which if you don't know, is a military language that's almost obsolete.

*Next slide.* It came in through Admiralty Arch and next was decoded by a signalman on Horse Guards Parade. Something I also do is I use systems, use different systems in which to place work and when asked to speak about Remembrance, it seemed appropriate to use Remembrance Day as a site.

With the help of Brunswick, who are here today, who became part of this project, we launched a very big media campaign because we wanted the message to really reach the entire nation, and it did. This was tremendous because it managed to gain a lot of news coverage.

*Next slide.* The message was literally laid on a wreath and, next slide, here you can see the television footage as it was laid on the Cenotaph. It was an unusual moment because it was the first time that you had conceptual art working within a ceremony like Remembrance Day. There it is; it's laid right there. You probably can't see, but it's basically, to my utter astonishment, it was placed along with the military wreaths. Next slide. The message was something that I had researched for over a year, "What turns us to stone, in remembrance we shine and rise to new days". It was a message that didn't aim to be critical. It was a thought of something that kind of pushed a few buttons and asked questions about such a day.

*Next slide.* These are a series of art works that were then presented at the museum. Alongside everything I do, I generally do an event or a performance and create a series of flat works that go with it. These series of works were called Careless Words Cost Lives. They were taken from the propaganda campaign launched in the Second World War that spoke about silence, and it seemed appropriate. You will see why when I come to the work that I made in Sharjah. The work that I will be showing later is important for me when speaking about these things, and I try and tie it in historically using that methodology. And basically, if you can go back one please, these messages are set against a backdrop of flora and fauna that you would associate with

Remembrance, combined with a military motifs and insignia. Please go on to the next slide please. This was a kind of marquetry piece that actually had the message inscribed in the museum, and we then launched a campaign in the tubes and it all came together in a book published by Thames and Hudson. It gives you an idea of how I try to embrace the subject matter if given the chance.

*Next slide.* This was a piece that I exhibited in Sharjah in 2002 in which I invited twelve members of the refugee community to swear an oath of allegiance on one screen and on the other screen they performed an action that they associated with their country of origin. It was fantastic that it was shown because while I was in Sharjah, the British and American forces invaded Baghdad and it came down. It was very exciting that this piece was shown because it was a provocative work at the time, which explored notions of dual citizenship, exploring the ritual of citizenship and really was a piece of work that was about the politics of identity and asking if languages equate to citizenship. This is an important work to show you in terms of the next piece, Together. This is something of a test we did two weeks ago, but when invited to do something for Dubai, I really wanted to make an open ended statement using the word "together" in English and in Arabic. What you will see is that it forms this kind of laser show where the words mesh. They sort of collapse. The structures collapse and they rebuild themselves as English and Arabic. It's quite melodic in its pacing. I really wanted to set this in a city that is a city that's full of promise with all these slogans all over the city that are talking about the future. For me, it's interesting to think of these works in the sense that citizenship is something you can't gain here unless I think you marry an Emiratee. I wanted to make an open-ended statement that was optimistic but also to really ask questions to do with integration at a time in a city that is evolving very quickly.

There are two more slides, to give you an indication. You will see tonight when it launches. I have some more work, but I don't know how we are doing for time.

### Maria Finders

Go ahead.

### Beth Derbyshire

The next project is a project for the Montreal Biennale in which I am making a city-wide intervention. It begins with a metro ticket on which the logo is printed on mass and I was invited to speak. I was invited by the curator to make a statement or to address the whole Canadian-Quebec issue, which believe you me is...

### Maria Finders

I grew up in Canada, I know a lot about it.

### Beth Derbyshire

Okay, so it seemed to me that when I looked into this issue, it was manifested largely in language. I don't know if you are familiar, but there are very strict language laws about the French being bigger than the English, and it's about the preservation of culture. I wanted to make a couple of projects which explored that, so this begins as a metro ticket, something that uses the artery of the city and it's something that everybody will take home with them. It's a transfer ticket; you get it for free and it's the kind of thing that will disappear into a different part of the city. *Next slide:* These are then meshed together into a collage. *Next slide.* They are made into a series of temporary signs that exist all over the city. You have, in fact, English signs without a French translation, which has taken some negotiation. It's quite interesting with all of these works. I often have to consult with officials and things like that. *Next slide.* This is the second project, I should go back one, because it's in connection with this project, but basically the other thing that I'm going to do is make a series of twelve projections in one of the busiest Metro stations in Montreal where we'll project this word "altogether". You will be familiar with this, Maria, in a sense that the words will be bigger and smaller, thus breaking the law and making the law at the same time. And ...

### Maria Finders

It's funny that you chose Expo 67.

### Beth Derbyshire

Because Expo 67, for those of you who aren't familiar, was a big landmark in Canadian culture. It was held in Montreal and it really placed Canada on the map. What I have proposed is to mint a coin in which we presented the North Pole. The show is called "Montreal Cracks the Sky", and I don't know if any of you know, but true north is actually in the sky rather than on the land. So, against this setting, I wanted to make reference to Expo 67, which celebrated the internationalism of Canada and use two interpreted phrases from both the English and French anthems, which I think is fairly self-explanatory. There is more, but I'm conscious of time.

### Maria Finders

We are going to see a little bit of work from Lara, but maybe we will get back to the other projects.

### Lara Baladi

Hello. Well, our show consists of only two works, which I video documented. I started doing this when I did my first installation. I started working as an artist with photography, and I very quickly moved into trying to push the boundaries of the frame and play with images in the context of Cairo where there are no professional labs and possibilities to work with the actual print on the side of printing of photography. I very quickly moved into making murals and installation music, imagery, videos, etc., so some of the two works that I'm going to show are two of the installations that I did which are of quite large scales. Of course, nothing seems very large in comparison here, but it's important for me to show this because part of the problem of living in the region and doing relatively large scale works is to move these works around and to expose them. Images, photographs of these works don't ever really give a sense of how one can experience the actual installations.

I also wanted to show another work, but I am not able to show it because of the context we're in. However, I think it's important that I mention that. It's work that I did with Egyptian painters who paint for, or used to – because their work is now somehow

dying – who used to make billboards for Egyptian cinema. I travelled up to Finland to make a mural in a museum, and the subject of the painting was Forty virgins in paradise. What interests me in that work, in terms of showing it, was the whole process of working with these people, being in Cairo and looking at how tolerant people can be in the context where we usually think that it's relatively closed. I won't show this, but I will show a work that I did in 2002, and then I will show the same work, which is at the DIFC but in the context of the Townhouse. This is the gallery that I'm here with, although the Townhouse doesn't have a space inside the fair. It is important to mention that it's a non-profit organisation, and it's a place that has really allowed a lot of artists in Cairo to get to know each other in the past ten years and interact with each other and to exhibit their work and be here today. I think that's very important. Maybe we can watch the two films.

*(Video playing)*

**Maria Finders**

This was installed in the Townhouse Gallery?

**Lara Baladi**

Yes. It was in 2002 at the first Photo Cairo event. It was in the large factory space of the Townhouse, which is located in a very dynamic, popular area but it's downtown Cairo, and surrounding the Townhouse are a lot of cafes and people working with different types of materials. I had a special team that also worked with me. People come in and out, engage with and even install the works and then see the works.

**Maria Finders**

It sounds like it's a really communal project for the whole area.

**Lara Baladi**

Yes. I think I knew this work would be difficult to move afterwards, so of course I filmed it. But I feel that when we come to places like this and we meet in places outside the context that we work in, we tend to think that we all work with the same sort of situations or forget that we work in different types of situations

with different potentials, different problems, with different advantages. I felt a little bit frustrated that people didn't understand what it meant to work in a place like Cairo and to produce work and to be an artist and so on. I started this work by filming the actual making of the work with the people that I work with to give a sense of what's going on backstage and what it takes to make a work in that context as well as how important people are in making the work, because Cairo has seventy million people.

**Maria Finders**

Seventy million people?

**Lara Baladi**

Yes. Here it's very hard to see people when we talk about buildings. We are not really talking about people, and the beauty of Cairo is its people. It can also be its nightmare but very often things are possible because of people, and I think that's the case everywhere. We are talking a lot about money, business, buildings, all of these things. I also think that things are possible because they are seeds that are planted by a lot of different people and encourage possibility and opportunities.

**Maria Finders**

Girls, since we have very little time, I want to ask you both a question about global context. Looking at your piece on Remembrance Day, I'm sure that nobody here knows what Remembrance Day is. When I saw your work the first time, I didn't realise you were from the Middle East. I thought you were a totally urban New York girl because of the very urban imagery you use, reusing, digital imagery, etc., and the way it's set up. Do you feel that you're carrying around part of a heritage when you come to a place like this? How can you live in this global context as an artist? Does it bring something to you?

**Lara Baladi**

I'm a little bit difficult to situate. Because my work has a lot of tension, it is difficult to always be accessible to people in Egypt where I live and also to be accessible or interesting or questioning in other contexts. I've lived in different parts of the world. I've



lived in Europe and I've lived in the Middle East, and a lot of people think that my work has a lot of Western tendencies. Others think that it doesn't but I think that's my strength. That is the tool I have that I have to use. What I actually tend to do is rather than enforce what separates us, is to look at what brings us together in an interesting way and an essential way. The work that I'm showing here at the DIFC, as much as this work that I have chosen to show, is somehow my most abstract work. It has figurative images and looks more at the cycle of history and the narratives and the sort of cycle of life rather than symbolic forms that cross over different spiritualities from Hinduism to Islam to Christianity. In that sense, yes, I don't have any problem going anywhere or working anywhere. Now if I have a choice, I don't think I will stay here. I've come here before and my first time in Dubai was actually a very beautiful one because I was invited to do a photographic story. I was completely thrown into the city and I spent eight days in the backstage of Dubai. I intentionally went that way because I knew everyone would expect to see buildings, and there have got to be people behind these buildings. I think working is possible everywhere. It's just what you're interested in and what's important for you and how you interact with places.

**Maria Finders**

And you Beth?

**Beth Derbyshire**

Well, for me, I think in terms of my practice. You can't help it, but your work is informed by where you are and I practice in London. But I think the older you get, the more you travel. To make a city a specific work is bringing my own values and looking at a place is using my head. I then apply my values and things that I'm interested in to it. I brought Message up because I wanted to show this audience, who are probably not familiar with what I do, how the public realm can be used as a site. For me Dubai is all about the visual. It's very surface, very visual, and it seems to have one on the outside of the city, or the outside space.

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4.30-5.00

**Wim Delvoye, Artist, Brussels, BL. with  
Vasif Kortun, Curator, Director, Platform  
Garanti, Istanbul, TR.**

**Maria Finders**

Thanks very much, girls. Up next we have another artist. Is it Belgium day today? We have another Belgian artist, Wim Delvoye. Unfortunately, we couldn't see one of Wim's pieces here in Dubai. We wanted to bring one of Wim's important works, which is a very big industrial truck that we wanted to put in front of this building on the beach. It would have been very fitting to have in Dubai, a construction site as it is. With Wim today is Vasif Kortun, who is from Istanbul. He is a curator. By the way, is it true you are actually the curator of the Venice Biennale Pavilion for Turkey because it's been on E-Flux? (laughter) Vasif has been working for many, many years at this fantastic venue in Istanbul called Platform Garanti, which he will present tomorrow afternoon.

It's very important that you come and learn more about that project. Let's start.

#### Vasif Kortun

Good afternoon. Thank you Maria and thank you Wim. This is such a privilege. Basically Wim, as we know, has quite a lot of energy and is a driven person so I won't interfere too much in this conversation. My place will be a little bit out of it. I've known his work for a while, for a long time, and I've always wanted to work with him. This was a kind of dream, always in the back of my mind. When you are running a smaller institution, it does not always allow you to realise some things to their fullest potential, especially if it's a very complicated work, which means many times work that needs absolute attention to detail. Wim's work is very much about that; paying attention to details from the beginning of the work until it is finished. It's extremely specific, even if it may have been originally an impossible proposal to start with. I'm really interested in this work because Wim is not a local artist. He is not a global artist. He's not really versed in the kind of global discourse of the professional language of art; he moves with it, he moves in and outside of it as well. His local realities are very specific and are also linked to a sort of historical vein, historical "organism"; he cuts through Flemish paintings, through European history. Inadvertently you can reach him perhaps from that position in the sense that he's also a male person, a classical white male artist at that. I do specify that he is a classical white male artist because there is a sense in which, in our present time where we expiate ourselves, we limit ourselves. There is a bit of self-censorship going on. It's not about self-censorship here or there. It's really about a burden of extreme political correctness. We are very careful not to go wrong, not to dwell on the imagination, not to make too many mistakes, not to hurt too many people and so on and so forth. It's in that way Wim positions his work outside the political establishment of political correctness. He also has a very interesting relationship with money; at times separating art and money and devaluing it and returning to it and devaluing it again and again. It is very interesting.

What we are going to look at today is not some of the work that has been recently extremely well mediated, such as the Cloaca machine or Links project. I think we are going to self-censor a little bit ourselves and talk about recent projects, in particular in this fantastic chapel he finished last year in Luxemburg and other projects in progress. Okay Wim, thank you.

#### Wim Delvoye

*(Slide)* This is where you will find us.

#### Vasif Kortun

Did you choose this set of specific works for here?

#### Wim Delvoye

I actually let someone else choose my work; an assistant. He was reasoning that people would be too sensitive to see some of my work. We were planning to do this culture truck in front of the fair, so half of the slides were already inspired by the fact that we were going to do this truck, and we hope to do this next year. There was not enough time to bring it here.

#### Vasif Kortun

Okay.

#### Wim Delvoye

Oh look, I thought there weren't any slides of Cloaca. This is my first machine in 2000 in the museum of Antwerp. It's 11 meters long and it simulates the eating and excreting of the human being. It contains real human bacteria, colon bacteria, stomach bacteria and enzymes, acids, a lot of chemical products, bio chemical products and everything is automated. It follows the complete journey that a potato or a cookie makes from mouth right through the digestive process.

This is another machine, but with stained glass windows in Düsseldorf, which makes it look more like a religious situation wherein the machine looks like an altar or something you pray for.

These are the pigs in China. This is the logo of the machine, so each machine has a logo or a mascot.

*(Slide)* Here you see me tattooing on my farm in China. In China, we have twelve or thirteen people who are doing this during all the different seasons, the springtime; winter, summer, so it's like life and death, winter and summer. We live on this farm and the pigs grow, we breed them, we tattoo them. Being tattooed gives them a lot of extra time because we don't care about their nutritional value; we only care about their artistic value.

*(Slide)* This is the new generation of Louis Vuitton bags. The artist who was asked by Louis Vuitton to do these cherry designs was very happy that we dealt with them in China, but Louis Vuitton wasn't very happy. We actually think we could win any legal battle against Louis Vuitton, and it's also part of the art piece when we get litigations with companies.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

I want to ask one or two questions. One is about the pigs. Do you get also offers to transport live work to institutions? This is probably one of your premises, how you complicate the process of circulation of art.

#### **Wim Delvoye**

Yes. We cannot cross borders with the live pigs because of complicated vaccination programs. It would be very difficult to do the paperwork, but we gladly give the live pigs to any offers from China. For us, this confusion between art and life is important. For example, this machine really does work and if you look at the tattooed pigs, even when you tattoo them for two seasons, it refuses to be an art piece. It's a pig as long as the pig is alive.

*(Slide)* So these are our bronzes, much more classical sculptures where I scan famous iconographic sculptures and with a computer recalculate the forms. And this is a double helix crucifix, so it's the DNA helix. There are lots of crucifixes together, which for me, related to what life is about or big questions about how life can be explained from different perspectives. *(Slide)* Okay, these are sculptures that are not finished yet but are about to be finished. We will be showing this at Art Basel. It's a gothic style truck. This is Central Park;

a bulldozer in Central Park and different circumstances around the same piece.

*(Slide)* This is a big commission we did for Belgium, in Antwerp. It's a church about twenty meters high and the church contains twelve stained glass windows. The stained glass windows are made from MRI pictures and x-rays, medical transparencies, and this is going on for three and a half years. It's like a real classical commission, like you would get a commission in the Renaissance or in the 16th century. You would just do that for somebody; I like that. Most of the pieces we do are for me a truth or a proof. By choice, most artists go to an art school because they're not good at anything else. And I wasn't good at anything, but still I wanted to make pieces that would somehow convince me that I could have actually done something else, that I could have been an architect or a doctor or a tattoo artist or something serious.

*(Slide)* This is an interior of a chapel that is already executed in Luxemburg in the museum; you could imagine how the drawings of the church will look like once it's executed. It's a modern building. People walk into this modern building and all of a sudden they come into this space, in this medieval style. The material is steel. Here you see x-rays of different things but never medical, like people kissing, machines, mobile phones, the stomach, different stomachs, and collages we make from different things. This is something that I will open next week in Paris. It's the scale-model of this church you saw in the drawings. It's four metres high.

I am also trying to make works, which might be appreciated by the connoisseur. But they can also live without connoisseurs; they can be just there. People just pass with their dog or have to be there and say "Oh, I like it, it's beautiful". I think it is very important for me – that people who don't really care about art are seduced. It's about street credibility.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

Why are you particularly interested in chapels and medieval buildings and such? Why this architecture as opposed to other forms and why from this particular moment in history?

### Wim Delvoye

It has to do with putting art into society, on the streets, just to have it there. It's also difficult to make. It's a work that goes on for many years before it's finished; it involves a lot of people. It's a bit like every cathedral, bringing all the artisans together, all the best people to do one thing and that's exciting. But it's also just a frame for these stained glass windows. I first did these twelve stained glass windows and only later I thought of this chapel to give them a context. I was not worried if it was an art piece or the frame of some other art pieces.

### Vasif Kortun

What role does visuality play in the work? Because, as you explain, the chapel is a communal project of different disciplines in which you change the shape of what we expect in a chapel. Or with the pigs. Even though they are tattooed, the tattoos themselves change shape as the animals develop, grow, fade. You have to re-work it so the visuality is actually part of the process. With the Cloaca machine, the visuality is not so primary. I'm thinking of this as kind of anthropomorphic in which the visible is not evident, or has re-ordered itself. I know that you also make drawings, but what is their role? How much preference do you give to visuality or where does it stand?

### Wim Delvoye

The visual for me is a way of reaching as many people as possible on many different levels. I look for a globalism not only in a geographic way. I look for a geographic globalism, but I also look for a vertical globalism, a class globalism, like intellectuals. But they can be just normal people. All these different hierarchies and classes and the dichotomy between high art and low art are non-existent for me; for me, it's all about trying to make things as visible and visual as possible. And of course the Cloaca machine was not that visual, and I also felt it was a problem. That is why I shape each machine like a visual image, like Mr Clean, because I felt the problem was that these machines were not interesting enough to just look, but at the same time they also reach a lot of people. Pigs, shovels and other plebeian objects – they're all the same. Some will refuse to be part of an intellectual discourse.

We are having an intellectual discourse, but somehow we cannot do it for more than five minutes and we have to drop in faeces and pigs. It's wonderful to have these proletarian notions that give this art an enormous amount of street credibility. It's globalist in a sense that everybody eats and everybody knows what the machine is like, we all eat and digest together, and in every country they eat and digest. There is something extremely globalist about Cloaca machine. And with the pigs it is the same. Whether you eat them or you cannot eat them, you know them. They are like parables. They are like parables when people want to explain high concepts and they talk about poor fishermen. They talk about peasants and sheep. To make people understand that, they make analogies with simple stuff. I talk about bacon and pigs and shovels and concrete mixers as a way to like find a common denominator for everybody and then talk about something higher than that.

### Vasif Kortun

So if you were to turn that to the street, you've done work in societies that are over-regulated, especially in the street space. In New York, in the park, I'm sure there were millions of rules that you had to abide by. Some art forms that are acceptable in Europe might be shocking elsewhere. If you close your eyes and think of Dubai, obviously they might not want a church, but can you just speculate on that because building permits are easier in certain places. And thank God they're easier because it allows the imagination to take hold as opposed to being limited by other things and here is that a thing that you wanted to do.

### Wim Delvoye

What's so interesting about Dubai, it must be a little bit like China. You come there and you have to start again. If a young artist, or a Gerhard Richter, exhibited in Beijing, it doesn't mean much for the Chinese people. It's the same, "Who are you?" they would say to Gerhard Richter. So it's like everybody gets a fresh chance in a country that is not necessarily going to take it all for granted. This might not apply for Chinese artists as their time will come of course, but several years down the line, there will probably be a higher regard for Western taste. It might also be



the same here in Dubai. You know Dubai is sourcing, a lot from the West but in such an enormous way that it's not up to us to say how they should do it. In twenty years, they will have done it so well that we cannot advise them really. I find it really exciting to be in a place that is able to encourage big projects, and although we haven't yet built any Gothic churches, the mere rumour of this happening made some people come up to me and say, "Oh, I want one too", and I'd say, "Yes, of course". In the Middle East some people might want a mosque. As I'm interested in ornaments and in making it difficult for myself, doing large things, things that will go on for years, I'm extremely excited about the idea that there is only an oral history and not a material history; that there was just desert here twenty or thirty years ago. There is this enormous energy to build and build and build and that attracted me a lot in China as well. Secretly I hope there will be interest and I can do big plans here.

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**Artist Focus**

## **Working with artists Collectors, art consultants and philanthropists.**

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**5.00-5.30**

**Judith Greer, Art Collector, London, UK.  
Mon Mullerschoen, Art Consultant, Munich,  
DE. Charles Asprey, Curator and Collector,  
Charles Asprey Award for Palestinian Art,  
London, UK. **Moderator** Maria Finders,  
Conference Curator, Director, Europe,  
Brunswick Arts, Paris, FR.**

**Maria Finders**

**We continue our discussion now, and we will be talking about some of the most important people in the art world: Collectors, Art Consultants and Philanthropists. Mon Mullerschoen is someone we call an art consultant. The role of the art consultant in the industry means somebody who basically consults collectors on what they should or should not be buying and who has a very good eye and knows the tastes and collections**

of their very discerning clients. Mon's job is to go through all that and make sure that the clients have good pieces in their collection. Judith Greer is a collector and a real patron of contemporary art projects. She has recently shared her knowledge and experience in a best selling book written with Louisa Buck, *Owning Art*. Charles Asprey, you've been a curator. You've been talking about art, working with artists and you have a very important project with the Palestinians, which includes an awards programme for young artists in Palestine but you are based in the UK. What we're going to do, everyone, is talk a bit about what they've been doing and what they're up to and then we can ask a few questions. Charles, tell us a little bit about your project in Palestine.

#### Charles Asprey

Hi. Well, we set up Art School Palestine about three years ago and it's really nothing more than a website. It's very, very difficult to build an art school in the West Bank at the moment. In fact, it would be virtually impossible to raise the funds necessary to do that, but in the three years that the website has been up and running, we've had five million hits on the site. We have curated exhibitions in the West Bank, including artists like Damien Hirst, Wolfgang Tillmans, Martin Creed and so on. We've built Palestine's first contemporary art library, which is in Ramallah in Bier Zeit University. We found that this flexibility of a website with spin-off projects was actually the ideal forum for this type of project and for this type of situation. Palestine is very unique, and in a way, it couldn't be any more different from the UAE as such. So that's Art School, and it really acts as a kind of forum for everything to do with Palestinian art and culture, be that a Palestinian artist working in Australia, Canada or Chile, wherever they are. They're drawn to this site and they can exchange ideas and then we've set up, I think the most important part is a residency programme, which is really crucial. We've taken several dozen artists from Palestine to the United Kingdom, where they are free to live and work and we cover all their costs. Those experiences they encounter in Great Britain are then taken back and shared, and they've found that to be extremely beneficial.

What they desperately want is this engagement, but they're at work and need a chance to be objective about their own work so we are very pleased with what this small project has become.

#### Maria Finders

It's very interesting because these projects seem to be accessed on mobility as opposed to displacement. I was thinking about Jack Persekian's project called CAMP (Contemporary Art Museum Palestine), which is a kind of nomadic art project, a nomadic museum because it's not really based on a physical location but rather on a series of experiences and encounters with art.

Mon, tell us a little bit about what you've been doing without revealing all your client's names.

#### Mon Mullerschoen

Well, I'm actually allowed to reveal two names. I currently have about five to six, I'm not even sure, collections that I'm working with: two private collections and two corporate collections. I can talk about the two corporate collections: Hubert Burda Media, a German publishing group, and the other is Roland Bergers Consultants, a consulting group. Both are internationally known. I would like to tell you more about working as an art consultant using the example of the Hubert Burda art collection. First of all, I wanted to tell you that I'm working with a very wide range of art. My collectors collect basically everything from Ancient Roman sculptures to old master paintings like Rubens, Cranach to nineteenth century drawing to the art work of the twentieth century like Warhol, Yves Klein, Picasso and others. . . Christopher Wool, Baselitz. . . For me, working with the client is a very intimate and private process. You have to spend a lot of time together, and you get to know each other very well. I basically work only with people I like and can relate to because, as I said, it's a really very intimate process.

Once somebody decides to start collecting, you have to define a strategy and build around this strategy. My strength, I guess, lies in my independent and discrete approach and in my ability to deliver tailor-made solutions and in my vast range of contacts in the global art world. I think it is very important that I am providing a good network for my collector.

I'm in contact with auction houses, galleries and museums, insurance companies, everything one might need when working with a collection, and I would like to tell you about the Hubert Burda collection. Hubert Burda is, as I said, a very well-known international publishing house with an annual turnover of about one billion dollars. We have one of the art critics from Focus, which is in the Hubert Burda Media group, sitting in the audience today. It is Germany's most well-known news magazine. Hubert Burda has been collecting artwork since the fifties and has always been interested in keeping the art in the workplace.

The collection is presented in offices all over Germany to bring those two different perspectives of art and the working world together. When I met Hubert Bulda for the first time in 1989, he already owned many pieces of art but there was no strategy or universal concept in terms of a collection. After a lot of exchange and research, we came up with the concept, which we installed in the early 90s – art media and communication. It was initiated by Dr Burda, who had the vision of taking a proactive role in bringing the world of art closer to the workplace. So we established this concept, which still stands as the collection's principal running thread today. There is already an existing stock of works, which will be expanded with a selection of new acquisitions. In addition, we wanted to support young artists. We established a very close relationship with the Munich Academy of the Arts; not only do we buy young art but we also have, in one of our office buildings in Munich, a space where we regularly show young artists' work. We feel that we not only support the artist by purchasing their art, but we also give them a space to show their work in public.

I think that corporate collections have special characteristics; they do not function like a traditional museum or art gallery and they have to assert themselves in the work place. Visitors are often surprised at the range of work on show in our offices, and even employees still discover the collection after it has been displayed for the past fifteen years.

For us it's very important because this art has been a source of motivation as well as remaining pertinent and provocative. At Hubert Burda, art is a source and inspiration of cultural values and part of the long-term benefits for employees and clients alike. The collection is not about financial investment. It is a cultural and social investment, primarily aimed at the welfare of employees, of course, although it just so happens that our past investments have continued demonstrating considerable yields in value. That's it for now.

### Maria Finders

That makes a lot of sense. Judith, you're a collector, so you're the kind of person that has to hire someone like Mon to buy art for you. Or do you buy your own art? How does it work?

### Judith Greer

It is important to have advisers when you really need them, but to me the most important thing in collecting is the actual engagement. The word "conversation" for me is the ability to have conversations with the people in the art world, which is what makes it really important. I think today we've had all these artists conversing with curators; we've had curators and writers and people talking to each other and it's so exciting. It's just so fundamental to my life and my love of art. Sometimes I think that the "why" of art is almost as important as the "what" of art. For my husband and I both, the conversations we've had over the years with the people in the art world have really formed the basis of our collection. Mostly every artist whose work is in our collection, we know personally, we've spoken with them, or if we don't know them personally, we've had incredible conversations with often very young dealers who are passionate about what they're doing. I think that today is a strange point in time where everything is so market-orientated. Everyone's talking about how expensive everything is and you've got to run, run, run, don't stop and think or you're not going to be able to buy that piece of art. What I think is that people need to take a step back and just stop. Maybe you can't afford it; maybe that's a good thing; maybe that will open up opportunities for you to find new and interesting things. I think that fundamentally collectors today are in a

difficult position; if you're starting out, what is your model supposed to be for collecting? There are so many people who are going to tell you how to spend your money, you know. You should buy this artist; you should buy that artist, you should do this or do that, but people need to stop and say you should meet this person and have a conversation and talk to them about why they love that art. That's what is really interesting about it.

If you're buying art for investment, that's a completely different thing. But the best collectors are people who are passionately engaged in the art world. They didn't all have a lot of money. There are fantastic examples of people who have very little money who bought art on their salaries and formed incredible collections that expressed their personalities and that have become hugely important donations to institutions, so I think for collectors today, the most important thing is to find a way to be engaged in the art world and to be engaged with the people who are making the art, who are talking about the art and to not just go after the art that already has the endorsement of big price tags. It's also important to go beyond that and actually take part in the process that "endorses" the art; being present in the early stages when support is needed. Take the work of Charles, for example. Charles has been an incredible art patron. One of the best parts about being a collector and being involved in the art world is to actually be able to think about how you're contributing by supporting the artists and the institutions and the young galleries and the people who really need your support. I mean, from a selfish standpoint, if you want to buy really important art works from the art world, you have to be respected.

A lot of people have money. They walk into a big gallery; they want to buy this class A artist and then they get told that the piece they want is not available. It's all been sold. It's all been placed. That's because no dealer is going to sell to someone they don't know and don't think is a good collector. They will not sell an important piece of art. They just simply will not do it because they are worried; they are there to look after their artists and their artists' reputations. But what does help you as an individual collector is first of all establishing your reputation, being known

as someone who is serious, being known as someone, for example, who supports the Serpentine Gallery that Julia Peyton-Jones who is coming on after and going to speak about. But these are really important ways for a collector to actually earn a reputation, gain some inside knowledge, be a patron, find out what's happening before it's already somebody's trophy.

#### **Maria Finders**

I have two questions for all of you. The first one is about this public-private partnership and the arts. We're here in Dubai and we had a discussion this morning about how Dubai can move forward in the next ten years as an art city. The private side of this comes from collectors and also comes from people like you, Charles, while the public side is the institutional side. Why are so many people now involved in these private initiatives and not getting closer to the public initiatives to see how to better support public institutions and, in turn, I think you are actually doing a little bit Judith, but what about this public/private relationship?

#### **Charles Asprey**

Are you talking about people setting up private foundations?

#### **Maria Finders**

Well, a lot of people these days tend to set up their own foundations or their own museums or build their own projects rather than supporting public institutions.

#### **Charles Asprey**

It is a phenomenon and I think it's a great tragedy, personally. The arts should be held up by these foundations, but they really ought to be getting into the main institutions. I think it's fine to be a collector up to a certain point, but in some cases, some have entered the realms of the Kunstverein and this is difficult. If you go to Florida, for instance, it's difficult to tell the difference between a museum of contemporary art and someone's private collection, or private home. These places have become giants, but I think size is not everything, you know, and as Judith was saying, some of the greatest collections have been small and really concise little collections. I think that's a really good way forward.



### **Maria Finders**

But it is a question of ownership in the sense that owning the art, owning that piece of territory and saying this is yours instead of saying, “I want to work for a public institution, I want to get my friends around”. In Germany I know there are a lot of initiatives right now. Arndt Oetker is involved in getting corporations closer to the arts. Is Dr. Burda kind of involved in that as well?

### **Mon Mullerschoen**

No. To be quite honest, as you said, I find it really difficult watching this. In Germany we have a lot of people building their own private museums and well, I think it's sort of like setting up your own memorial. I'm not sure what to think about it, to be quite honest. It's a very difficult subject, but no, Dr Burda is not involved.

### **Maria Finders**

So he's not involved in public institutions? Could it be a question of incentive? If there was more incentive from the public institution, what do you think?

### **Judith Greer**

I think so. I think the institutions have not been good enough about allowing their collectors or potential patron base in. There are, of course, examples of good collaborations, and here I would point to Julia Peyton-Jones as one. She quite single-handedly helped transform the patron base in London. Through the Serpentine Gallery, she has provided an opportunity for people who are not traditionally the big collectors, not the big art supporters that everyone knew, to come on-board and help out. A lot of new people have come in and become quite substantial funders of the Serpentine Gallery and are really proud of it. They've learned a lot and this has been a really incredible example in London. I'm on the board of Art Angel and what we found is really true. Art Angel is a non-profit group in London that commissions artists' projects, but we need funding for each of the projects. What we have found is that the closer you involve an individual patron into the process of creating the projects, of creating the art and meeting the artist, the more interested and

excited they are to actually help you to realise those projects with really substantial amounts of money.

I think if you look at the Tate: I had lunch last week with Ann Gallagher, who used to work for the British Council in Latin America and is now basically the curator for Latin America at Tate. She's also working closely with what they call the Latin American acquisitions committee, which is a committee composed of individual patrons that are dedicated to acquiring Latin American art for Tate's permanent collection. These people get together socially, but they also learn about the art; they travel and they've made incredible contributions that never would have been made to the Tate collection, and the same kind of endeavour is being done for the Far East. I would say to do one for the Middle East as well. Find a curator who can work at Tate and teach them how to acquire Middle Eastern art.

### **Maria Finders**

And the last question has a little bit to do with philanthropy. Everyone thinks that when we're involved in culture in some way, we're doing it for very noble reasons. But philanthropy, cultural philanthropy, has another side. How can we encourage people here in the Middle East to think about this relationship? Is supporting art considered philanthropy? What is this “touchy” relationship between money and art? Charles?

### **Charles Asprey**

It has to be about philanthropy now; otherwise, you're just one of the crowd. There are so many collectors in the world at the moment. Quite frankly, it's not very difficult to be a collector, and philanthropy for me certainly has become a real *raison d'être*. It goes from what Judith was saying about actually meeting the artist; it goes to helping to publish a catalogue or a book, donating a work to an institution, fundraising for an exciting project; that is philanthropy. We've got to get away from this myth that going into an art gallery, buying a painting or sculpture, taking it home and putting it on the wall is collecting. It's not. It can't be enough. What I would say to people in this part of the world where there is a lot of money around, the temptation to

quickly acquire big names must be quite overwhelming. I would just say “slow down”; take your time. Small collections can be very, very strong and very important and very influential. Support institutions and support grass roots education and the production of artwork. That is true philanthropy, as it was in the nineteenth century and as it should be again.

#### **Maria Finders**

Getting involved and getting people involved. Mon, would you ever advise your clients to stop collecting, to really become art philanthropists or work on the production of art as an art consultant?

#### **Mon Mullerschoen**

No, I don’t think it is necessary that they have to stop collecting, but I think what is very important, one of the things Burda Media does in its work, is to support young artists. We can see that in this region of the world where there are few art institutions, no art classes in the public schools; that support would be needed in the area of education. You really need to try to support getting academies here, art schools, art clubs, where you can educate people but where you can keep collecting and do this at the same time. I think this is very important.

#### **Maria Finders**

Yes, Judith?

#### **Judith Greer**

I think when you look at the kind of prices that a young Peter Doig’s work is fetching, five point some million dollars a couple of weeks ago, pounds, yes. Peter was horrified. How horrible is that? Is it going to make that person proud? The person who bought that piece, are they going to be a little bit embarrassed in a funny way? I would think so. Increasingly, the sophisticated in the art world will go towards philanthropy and it’s great to be able to collect art. It’s great to be able to have some beautiful works of art, but the kind of hoarding and institutional private museum building, I think, is really going to wane and I don’t see that as something that should be continued. Certainly people in the art world don’t think it’s a good idea.

#### **Artist Focus**

## **Working with artists The Serpentine Gallery as a Laboratory.**

5.30–6.30

**Julia Peyton-Jones, Director, Serpentine  
Gallery, London, UK.**

**Hans Ulrich Obrist, Serpentine Gallery,  
Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes  
and Director of International Projects,  
London, UK.**

#### **Maria Finders**

**So we will continue our conversations.  
We said that Julia Peyton-Jones was in  
the room. There she is, and I think you’re  
missing someone with you, which is  
Hans Ulrich Obrist. We are coming to  
end of this very long and magnificent day  
with a new model of an art space on the  
move. The model of the Serpentine is,  
as Judith Greer said, a very interesting  
model not only in terms of how it  
presents art, but also in terms of getting  
people interested in working with the  
institution, with the artists and helping  
to produce art.**

We're very privileged today to have Hans Ulrich Obrist, who probably needs no introduction. He's been a curator for more years than we can remember; he's written countless books on art, he's encouraged many young artists not only in the Western world but was also very involved in getting the focus on Chinese artists and more recently on the Middle Eastern artists.

Julia Peyton-Jones is the strength behind the Serpentine. Over the past years, she has pulled it forward into this new model of one of the most vital institutions in the UK and is now reaching out, throughout the world, thinking about new ways of dealing with art and experiencing art. A very big project was done in the Battersea Power Station with Chinese artists, which really put something new on the map. I would like to welcome you both.

**Julia Peyton-Jones**

We must make a strategic decision about whether we have a table that separates us or whether we sit on the same sofa. Would you allow us to just talk amongst ourselves for a second? (laughs)

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

So this is a ping pong.

**Julia Peyton-Jones**

And as such, completely unrehearsed. As always when Hans Ulrich and I do something together, it's trying out something new and seeing what we can take forward for the next time and what should be dropped. So you're part of the experiment, if we may put it like that.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

We will thank, of course, Maria Finders and everybody here for the invitation and for allowing us to experiment. We are going to do two things: first an introduction of the Serpentine Gallery, and then go into some projects that we thought might be interesting.

**Julia Peyton-Jones**

One of the things I want to say is that this collaboration between Hans Ulrich and me is now a year old in terms of his work at the Serpentine. Before he came to the Gallery we discussed, for at least a year, how we might work together. The genesis of our

relationship began with an exhibition he curated for the Serpentine in 1996 called Take Me I'm Yours. This was an extraordinary show of artists, many of whom had not been shown before in the Serpentine, and it was exactly as the title indicates: a show that was participatory by nature and included artists such as Gilbert and George, Douglas Gordon, Wolfgang Tillmans, Carsten Holler and Christine Hill.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

We then started to think about how we could accomplish the public institution in the 21st century that would function as a ping pong on a daily basis, in terms of a content expansion, which does not necessarily happen through new wings or new buildings but actually just by using the space we have, and then venturing into all kinds of other possibilities. In some ways, this is also part of the thinking around the whole museum discussion that we've had in the context of Art Basel I think some of the questions which came up there are also relevant and urgent to discuss here with the many new museums popping up. Also, the influence of homogenising forces can mean that more and more of these museums can look the same. We feel that it is incredibly important that there is diversity; different models, big museums and small museums, fast museums and slow museums, which should all be considered Important as contributing to the new model. It's interesting just to look at these different models to see how they can be manifest before moving forward.

**Julia Peyton-Jones**

One of the things that has been incredibly interesting to me, having been the Director of the Serpentine Galleries since 1991, is the various chapters that have fallen naturally as part of the institution's evolution, reflecting the cultural developments in the UK. For example, when I first arrived at the Serpentine, the challenge was just to develop the programme because three months after I had my first day, there wasn't a show and the slot after that was also empty. It was quite a thing to just take the programme forward on a sort of day-to-day basis, and in the face of cultural resistance from the public and also the press.

Then there was a significant challenge in terms of the building, which was really quite unsuitable in some ways for showing works of art. We planned a big renovation, and the post-renovation is in itself another chapter which allowed the institution to do different kinds of exhibitions and allowed us the flexibility to reflect better the art of our times. It gave us more freedom. The building was more sympathetic and we pushed it very hard to respond well to the art we showed. The fourth chapter was really what do you do with an institution that is really the size of a house, as it is modest in scale. Thinking about the contribution of the Serpentine internationally, Hans Ulrich and I decided that we wouldn't assume you all knew the gallery and our talk is to share with you our vision.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

May we start this first presentation?

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

This is a photograph of the Serpentine by Hiroshi Sugimoto, who had a show at the gallery three or four years ago. He was planning his big retrospective exhibition at the Mori Museum and wanted to take installation photographs of his exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery. It seems to capture the character of the institution. It was constructed in 1934, has four rooms and the layout of the rooms is now exactly the same as it was when it was first designed and used as a teahouse in Kensington Gardens, where it is situated. It's a house in a park.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

The scale of the house, and its density, allow for quite an extraordinary scale of experience with art. Another house museum of that scale is in London, the Sir John Soane's museum, where Sir John Soane who was a 19th century architect, transformed this living environment into a museum. It's not by accident that these museums, and this is also very true for the Serpentine, are often among artists kind of favourite museums.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

So the idea was to take the Serpentine house and really push it hard and think of the building as the backbone to the whole

programme. From this the domestic scale could resonate in a way that we could transform the building every time we worked on an exhibition. Next slide please: This is another slide of the building. And here are some very important figures: the visitor numbers have now increased; they are nearly 800,000 a year; we are consistently maintaining free admission, which is incredibly important in terms of access and wanting as many people to come to see the programmes as possible. We have a modest public subsidy. It is our choice to raise large sums of money to realise our programmes.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

This is a situation that is a crossing of lots of different audiences. If you think, for example, of a show like Thomas Demand, it was visited by 150,000 people. It means that visitors who would not usually go to see contemporary art would visit the Serpentine. Can we move on to the next slide? Here are a couple of older shows.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

Yes. One of the things that we do is commission artists to make work especially for the Serpentine. Richard Serra was an early case in point. It was a project that was shown in tandem with the Tate's Weight and Measure, which they commissioned for the Turbine Hall. It also gives you an idea of what the Serpentine looked like before its renovation. Next slide. Again, pre-renovation Richard Wilson, who literally cut the building with his work. Next slide: both inside and outside. Doug Aitken is an artist in whom Hans Ulrich and I both shared an interest. At the Serpentine we commissioned him to literally turn the building inside out and upside down. He used the workshops in the basement, which nobody ever sees for obvious reasons, and we created a completely different orientation that went from the unseen basement floor to the top of the Serpentine roof. *Next slide please.* At night Doug made the Serpentine a beacon throughout London. Yes, can we just quickly flip through those? Ellsworth Kelly. Rather more recent from the Uncertain States of America.



### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Uncertain States of America is a show curated by Gunnar Kvaran, Daniel Birnbaum, and me that changes for each of the venues it will be showing in, so it's a kind of travelling laboratory. At the moment, the show is in Moscow and will then it will move to The Herning Art Museum in Denmark. It is a show that started in Oslo and has over the last three years developed into all kinds of different ramifications. It keeps changing as new work is being added, so it's an exhibition that develops around a complex dynamic system. We should move on because we will speak about a couple of shows in depth. I think one of the things that really triggered the collaboration between Julia and me is this sort of shared interest in architecture. From the very beginning of the 1990s, I started to work with Kasper König. There was an environment where you had daily contact with architecture; there was the marvellous cafeteria where Peter Cook, Cedric Price and architects like that would come. Every day everybody had lunch or dinner with the artists. There was a whole contact zone between art and architecture, but you also had architects involved in exhibitions. Further back, I think of many interesting moments, founding moments that would trigger new ideas about the relationship between art and architecture. We continue to think that this is an incredibly fertile ground in which an art institution can operate and at the Serpentine we want to bring architecture and art closer. Long before we collaborated, Julia had already invented the annual architectural commission, the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, and having curated a lot of shows with architects from Rem Koolhaas to Zaha Hadid, we will continue to emphasize these kinds of collaborations.

### Julia Peyton-Jones

Yes, there are three strands to the Serpentine programmes: exhibitions, architecture and education of the public programmes. The Pavilion project really looks into exhibiting architecture in a different way; in other words, instead of doing an exhibition about architecture like of drawings, models and photographs, we commission an architect to design a structure that we then build and site on the Serpentine lawn for three

months. It is still the only scheme of its kind worldwide, and as Hans Ulrich and I have just said, architecture is one of our shared concerns. Importantly, while other people are expanding their museums, we create a new wing, so to speak, on an annual basis by sitting this annual commission on our lawn.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Obviously this idea of a temporary Pavilion structure, allows us to experiment in the way that Alexander Dorner once defined it in the early 20th century: "the art institution as a laboratory". This is an idea that is a permanent transformation; that there is an oscillation between object and process that is an institution with multiple identities; that it's pioneering, active and not holding back and in this sense very dynamic. Obviously, each time the Pavilion is reinvented, we can say it's almost like a parallel Serpentine each summer. When the structure pops up in July there is a sort of a second institution where an extended programme happens, where events happen, artists performances, lectures - a whole lot of dynamic styles, a parallel reality.

### Julia Peyton-Jones

Yes, as Hans Ulrich says, the Pavilions were a parallel reality that first began with Zaha Hadid in 2000. Here is an example of her tented structure; a folding and undulating form (next slide) that developed the next years with Daniel Liebeskind and this extraordinary structure called Eighteen Turns. That had the shortest lead times from conception to completion of any of the Pavilions at three months, but it's usually a six-month time scale, which is about the organizing period we might have for one of our shows. Next: Toyo Ito. I should add an important fact: the structure for this project goes against everything that you would normally associate with construction, it's a team-led approach and one of the founding members of the team was Cecil Balmond, who is deputy chairman of Arup. His team at Arup, the Advanced Geometry Unit, was absolutely key to these projects happening. Next please. This commission by Toyo Ito, which is now sited at Battersea Power Station, and will be referred to again when we discuss the Battersea Power Station, the China Power

Station. Next please. This is Richard Rogers giving a talk in the Pavilion. Hans Ulrich talked about the public programmes that take place in the Pavilions as they are used really throughout the day and into the evening for a range of events. It can be a café by day and then a public forum for entertaining at night. Richard Rogers wanted to talk about his parents' house as being the seminal project of his career. Next slide please. Oscar Niemeyer completed and designed this construction in 2003, (next) and this is an unrealised project, plans (unrealised) for their Pavilion, which again, we'll talk about later. One of the new developments of the programme since Hans Ulrich and I have been working together is an agency for unrealised projects.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

At the Agency of Unrealised Projects, we are in the production of reality. In the world of contemporary art, we are not really aware of the unrealised projects, even those of the most well known artists because, unlike architecture projects, they don't really get published. But many artists have unrealised projects, projects which have been censored, projects which have been too big to be realised: dreams, projects which also just do not fit into the parameters of the existing institutions: the museums, the galleries or art fairs. So our idea was based initially on setting up an agency where we would gather all these unrealised projects by world leading artists and where we, little by little, will facilitate and produce the reality. So it's almost like an archive where little by little we try to make these different artists' dreams come true.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

This is Alvaro Siza and Eduardo Souta de Moura with Cecil Balmond. This was the Pavilion in 2005. Then in 2006, this was the project by Rem Koolhaas and Cecil Balmond with Arup. It was a really seismic shift about how we began to conceive of the Pavilion programmes in so far as the content of the Pavilion; what happened inside the structure became as important as the structure itself, so we really developed that and pushed the programmes very, very hard.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

To some extent, the Pavilions have always been a vessel for all kinds of events. This was the first time, however, that Koolhaas as an architect no longer wanted to have to separate structure and content. He sat with us for many days and was actually thinking about how we could develop the Pavilion and at the same time develop a string of content that would run throughout the summer. He became not only, with Cecil Balmond, the architect of the whole summer Pavilion; but he also became the architect of our whole summer programme, with hardly any vacation. It was a non-stop content production with Marathons, lectures, talks, conferences, and Koolhaas has kept coming back to London. We can talk about that later.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

This is one of the twenty-four hour interview Marathons that took place. It was one of the most extreme events that happened in the Pavilion last summer, with Damien Hirst coming to be interviewed by Rem and Hans Ulrich at four o'clock in the morning. As you can see, there was a very good audience that remained with the project throughout the night. It was an extraordinary unfolding of a very wide range of different people that really mapped London from a whole range of different perspectives. It had a different dynamic throughout the twenty-four hours that made it an unbelievable, unique event in the city and also beyond. As a gallery and as an exhibition space, the Serpentine needs all kinds of possible formats of exhibitions and projects. Artists exhibiting at the Serpentine Gallery are usually very aware of all the things that have happened before, and that's also important of such a history because then it's all based on that existing history. Interestingly enough, with knowledge production and conferences, we have much less reflecting about this sort of idea.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Usually we just have a round table and then a few people discuss, but there are many possibilities to change the rules of the game. It's interesting to see how many different formats have already been tested here this afternoon. It goes from a more prolific panel to conversations between two people so there are all kinds

of possibilities. How can this then be adapted and include new kind of features like what we came up with together with Rem, which was to map London and to have people from all fields: from art and architecture to literature, fashion and design, come for half an hour interviews and do this nonstop for twenty-four hours. We didn't sleep and people could come whenever they wanted. The speakers chose the hour, so Damien Hirst chose 4 am, but he could also have breakfast with Gilbert and George or he could have afternoon tea with Doris Lessing. Obviously, people came and went. There were also a lot of people who actually slept in the park and then joined in again with the discussions. Suddenly the conference took a new form, like an open air concert...

#### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

(Slide) This was another time, a night view of the Marathon, which was a sort of Woodstock experience where people really took over the Serpentine and owned it in an entirely different way. Thinking about the role of the public sector which we mentioned earlier, namely the importance of one of the things that differentiates a public institution and a private one, is this idea of ownership of the institution. The Serpentine, we hope, typifies this in a particular way as it really comes into its own during the summer. I am thinking about the opportunities of this region and that it is really the beginning of something very important with the first of the Gulf Art Fairs. Obviously, more are going to follow, and it really is the ownership of the people in this region to come and adopt not only contemporary art, architecture and design but also to adopt the idea of the role of the institution and to support the institutions here in the future. But the Marathon was a classic example of the Serpentine at its very best: open, engaging, and dynamic.

#### **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

Another view of the Marathon. We can also say that the idea with Rem Koolhaas was to develop the Pavilion into a kind of studio so that things were recorded during the day and night and the growing digital archives were broadcasted from the Pavilion as a

witness of what had passed, the different activities, the different hours of the day, even the change of the season as the summer Pavilion turned into an autumn Pavilion, and culminated into a post-Marathon actually during Frieze Art Fair.

#### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

Then we get on to education and public programmes; one of the three strands that are important to the Serpentine. When thinking about what may be developed here in Dubai, and looking at the British model, education and public programmes are an incredibly important part of the structure of any public institution. Next please. Some of the examples of the programmes, which really are for people from three through to ninety-three, can be small and finely focused projects led by artists with communities or they can be as this one - a very large scale project called Exhibition Road, the institutions in the street, who have been our partners over a long period of time. It's a museum mile really, and we are at the very top of it with our orientation in the park.

#### **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

This raises the issue of collaboration between institutions and very often these days, the idea of franchising comes up. These relationships sometimes follow along the lines of airline alliances, but maybe there are other models that can be created to host the collaborations between art institutions. We had a very interesting discussion the other day with Daniel Birnbaum; he thinks we could actually learn a lot from Husserl, the philosopher who was into a subjective kind of methodology between art institutions and an idea that maybe an institution becomes what it is only in its relation to others. From this premise, we can bring about new forms of alliances, new forms of collaborations and dialogues, which are also to do with reciprocity. It's part of how we imagine the Serpentine will engage with globalisation and somehow pop up in different dialogues all over the world.

#### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

One of the things that is so important about what Hans Ulrich has just said is that part of our new institutional dynamic, requires

us to go out from the building, to embrace all our colleagues in the great institutions in Exhibition Road, to work globally, which we will talk about more later. But using the scale of the Serpentine, this modest scale as a starting point means the world quite literally is our oyster. At least, we think of it in that way.

#### **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

Yes, we can maybe move on quite quickly: Yona Friedman, the urbanist, pioneered a lot of visionary architecture for schools and knowledge productions in the Fifties and Sixties, particularly in India, and was also very active in the Middle East and in Asia. Friedman is a Hungarian-born artist who lives in Paris. He is now in his eighties.

#### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

Indian artist Runa Islam created a project commissioned by Sally Tallant, Head of Education and Public Programmes in the Serpentine, which we showed in a two week exhibition in the galleries. The commission was to work with North Westminster school, that was about to close, to be completely changed to become one of the city academies in a new wave of education models that the government has introduced in the UK. Runa Islam worked with students in that school from ages eleven to eighteen and filmed them. The students helped to write the script, they helped with the whole production of the film and it became a very distinguished work of art that stood on its own merits, quite apart from the context in which it was commissioned. These are some of the examples of the pupils who took part. We then move onto the expanded programmes. Perhaps the most dramatic and large scale of this is the temporary home we had at Battersea Power Station, one of London's great landmarks. It can be seen almost throughout the city. It was open to the public for the first time because of the exhibition that took place in this building. An exhibition about Chinese contemporary art, architecture and sound, playing very much to Hans Ulrich's great knowledge of the subject over more than two decades and also to the local, in a sense, in so far as whilst there have been many exhibitions of Chinese

contemporary art all over the world, perhaps what was noticeable in London was that there had not been such a number of exhibitions in the UK and, in particular, London. And so with this appetite for new horizons, new economies, we decided to look at the art of China in the context of Battersea in this urban ruin as it was then and it continues to be.

#### **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

It's a beginning of a bigger project. We think it's important, in London, to show these extraordinary new dynamic centres of art that now happen in the world. These ideas are related to how French historian Fernand Braudel said in the sixteenth century: you have these extraordinary shifts, almost seismic shifts, and then all of a sudden new centres in the world pop up. We feel that's something that is happening right now with China, with India and very strongly also with Middle East, and we feel that it's incredibly important and urgent to map these changes. So we plan a whole series of exhibitions of which China marks the beginning. All over China there are triennials and biennials happening in abandoned factories and newly constructed developments, so we felt that Battersea would be the perfect site to capture this spirit.

#### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

This is the ruin for those who didn't see it. The show embraced art, architecture and design, it took place throughout the site in Battersea Power Station and the architectural component, which you can see here with Ma Qingyun's structure through which you looked with the frame capturing the different sight lines of Battersea. It was important to embrace the site and this is how the artists and architects used it - most of whom came to visit Battersea before their work was installed and, of course, the scale and condition of the building really informed what was possible. But in terms of the word "mapping", which Hans Ulrich has used, whether we are mapping culture globally in this way or whether we are mapping the immediate proximity in which the Serpentine sits is an umbilical cord that runs throughout our work.



### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Can I also say it's not an event-based approach: obviously it's become rather frequent that institutions will mount a major China exhibition, but for us, this is more than just a one-off exhibition. We want to grow China Power Station over the next couple of years to have a really sustained and ongoing dialogue with different geographies. The project, as it moves from place to place, will evolve. The project was conceived and curated in collaboration with the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo, where it will take place in September of this year, and the exhibition will happen during the Olympics in 2008 in Beijing so it's in this sense a Marathon. It's about long distance running.

### Julia Peyton-Jones

This was a remarkable piece by the young artist Cao Fei, who was also commissioned to do two performances that took place at the opening of the exhibition. This is an example of an artist who really is known in the West but whose career has really developed as a result of the China Power Station exhibition, where the work was seen to good effect. If we go onto the next slide, this piece, which cut right across the top floor of Battersea Power Station, was a commission specifically for the site. There were a remarkable 100,000 apples, by Gu Dexin, which were made into this extraordinary wall that deteriorated throughout the exhibition, which ran for one month. The apples also recycled into China Power Station cider, which is soon to be delivered to the Serpentine –another example of sustainability and longevity.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Here (*slide*) is a pioneer of Chinese art, Gu Dexin, together with Huang Yong Ping, Chen Zhen, Ai Wei Wei, an extraordinary generation of pioneers of the eighties in China. We felt that it was important that alongside this very young generation of Chinese artists who emerged after 2000 that we also show the pioneers. We spoke to many artists and basically figured out that four or five artists of this pioneering generation do resonate a lot with the new generations.

(*Slide*) That's the logo of Liam Gillick for the Agency of Unrealized Projects. The agency will not only produce an archive of unrealised projects of artists from all over the world, it will then try to help the artist to realise these projects. It will also trigger exhibitions, books, a whole literature of unrealised projects. Of artists from all over the world, it will then try to help the artist to realise these projects. It will also trigger exhibitions, books, a whole literature of unrealised projects.

### Julia Peyton-Jones

Yes, one of the important things about this project is that it won't be in an exhibition per se. It will be more like a catalogue, a visual catalogue of what the possibilities might be, so that we will have a whole menu of possible ways of showing art.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Recently, I have been speaking to writer and film theorist Jalal Toufic, and we were discussing the cultural context in the Middle East today. There is a very strong emerging art market; there is an art fair, auctions - it's unbelievably important to take into account this sort of dynamic. Art is constituted by many, many other aspects, and while auctions and art fairs are very important, we also need to go further to what is essential in the dynamic of art, and the conditions in which it is produced. Open dialogue and collaborative project-based work is a very important part of this. New forms of experimental schools, and here we think of course of Black Mountain College, are also equally important and urgent.

### Julia Peyton-Jones

(*Slide*) This is a photograph of two perspectives of the Pavilion last year, that explains, particularly in the image on the right, the position it had in London. It's an incredible balloon. For so many people, the Serpentine is ideally located and indeed that's true, but it's also set apart from the city, in a park, which gives us an unparalleled position to explore what it means to have a public art gallery in the centre of London in an incredibly privileged area. However, what is also notable about the Serpentine is that to the north of the park, just five minutes by car from the gallery,

there are some of the poorest parts of London where ninety-five different languages are spoken in the schools, whereby there is very severe hardship and where most of our most important work in education and public programmes takes place. It is within this context that the Serpentine can make a different kind of contribution to the lives of young people who fundamentally have been affected by some of the work that we have done with them to develop mentally their skills in both communication and also with the public and changed the perspective of what their futures might be as a result.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

While the Pavilion is really about architectural form and composition, its inspiration comes from the desire to create a perfect setting for dialogue and encounter. After many years of sitting in lecture theatres and situations, we were thinking of how wonderful if it could be the space that could combine content and form, obviously this whole idea of the balloon also being a speech bubble - a place where compositions at the same time, communicate between inside and outside. Whenever the structure was active at night, films were projected into the bubble. You could see through the airplane on the right hand side, particularly during the night when events took place. They could be seen from very far away.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

I think the other thing that has been incredibly interesting that Hans Ulrich has mentioned is that the screens around the Pavilion continually played the archive of the events of that summer, which took so many different forms. Some were durational, some were completely and utterly spontaneous, and that archive was actually a way of mapping a moment in time about what the Serpentine did in London. Those participants made an important contribution and reflected back to us their perspective of the city. It will be a collection of DVDs and also a publication, which is yet to be realised.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Also, the Thomas Demand frieze was there early on in the

project, creating a bridge. Rem Koolhaas, who designed the Pavilion with Cecil Balmond, and Thomas Demand, who exhibited his work in the Gallery concurrently, had never met before. They made studio visits and out of this dialogue, the frieze developed for the Pavilion. But these are very early days, and we see a great potential in the years to come to have more of that dialogue between architect and artist and further enhance it. The furniture was a fundamental element of the whole project. On the one hand, it reminds me of these maquettes that Koolhaas has in his office where they develop master plans with buildings out of this inner material. It's a kind of micro/ macro play, but on the other hand, visitors could really move these elements around in the space completely freely. They could build towers with it. In fact, they could be benches. If a couple of people came to have coffee in the afternoon, they could do their own circle and isolate themselves. In the evening it could be moved away and the party could take place in a situation which was very participatory and where the furniture could be used in all kinds of ways. We have thousands of photographs showing how different constellations could occur in this space.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

Yes. The Pavilion as a sort of amphitheatre is something that's being developed more and more and we are working on that this year. The design of this year's Pavilion and the Pavilion as a project is just the same as building a permanent building in the city except, of course, it is only temporary. We have to fulfill all the usual requirements of planning permission and all the statutory requirements, but I think one of the things that is most fascinating and was particularly exemplified by last year's structure is the fact that the public embrace it as if it's their own right from the onset. Hans Ulrich's description of the public moving around the furniture, building their own castles - it was very telling and also very successful. The appropriation of this structure existed right from day one and continued to play out throughout the summer. It happens every year, perhaps, because of how the Pavilion is programmed. Next slide please. The design team that works on this, and obviously led by the architects

and the structural engineer, thinks very carefully about all the different services and in Rem and Cecil's Pavilion, it was very direct and, of course, highly effective.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

What is also interesting is not only the unbelievable diversity of events we organised but also the Pavilion's existence and the events that others organised there, which helps us with the financing of the structure and our programme. They're the most diverse events taking place. They can range from car launches (a car gets moved into a Pavilion), to parties by publishers with all their authors, to music events, so basically the diversity of what happens in this space is also part of the project. The architects actually wanted a picture to be taken of every single use of the Pavilion.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

One of the things that Hans Ulrich has mentioned is the events, but perhaps an event that is particularly well-known in London, and indeed elsewhere covered by The New York Times, is The Summer Party, which is a fundraising event. It's one of the surprisingly successful things that the Serpentine does as it embraces new audiences. Some people don't know much about contemporary art or perhaps haven't even visited an art gallery; however they come to our annual fundraiser, which has been so effective in raising the gallery's profile amongst a certain group of people. The diverse audience is perhaps what makes the Serpentine very particular and therefore a gallery, an institution that's very much embraced by people with very different horizons.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Maybe we can move on to the next slide. Here is Zaha Hadid, a trustee of the Serpentine Gallery, who has been very important from the very beginning in terms of this Pavilion project, having designed the first one. Here is Zaha being interviewed about her extraordinary projects in the Middle East by Rem Koolhaas.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

And Rem, of course, being her teacher at the Architectural Association. Next slide. And then back to Battersea Power Station. Next slide: Now this is a very important aerial view of Ma Qingyun's mapping that we adopted for the Battersea Power Station. It was a plan about how people used the site, and it was his master plan about how he wanted people to engage with a very significant footprint. It involved about 30 acres of Battersea and how to orientate people around the site from the great structure of the station itself to the Toyo Ito's Pavilion, which was within sight but also quite far away. So Ma made these incredible line drawings on the ground, which indicated the circulation routes, velocities in so far as some were to do with cars arriving, some to do with bicycles. As a way of encouraging people to explore the site as a whole, we installed something like 200 bicycles that people could use throughout the site to go from A to B and just abandon.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Routine is a kind of enemy of exhibitions to some extent. It's always about reinventing. It was through the very unusual set up in this site at Battersea, that completely different work got triggered, which otherwise would never have happened. Ma Qingyun developed a work on several square kilometres, which changed through the rain. Fragments of the piece are still there on the Battersea site.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

Battersea Power Station was designed by the same architect as the building that now serves as Tate Modern. Indeed, we only adopted one wing, the Turbine Hall B. It's got a companion on the other side that you don't see, but you can see again here the markings on the ground.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Yung Ho Chang developed all these viewfinders, which revealed all these aspects of the building. Usually you cannot see a view of the visitors in the big Turbine hall, where we commissioned Ou Ning to develop a sound installation. This led to twenty artists and

composers from all over China developing sound pieces. The main space of Battersea Power Station became a sort of sonic environment.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

The Tank of Xu Zhen, which was the first thing you saw when you came into the Turbine Hall, was a sensation coupled with sound that really assaulted the senses in the most constructive way. One of the things we needed to think about was how to embrace that whole epic scale of the site, which was bigger than anything that one could possibly imagine if you hadn't actually seen it. Sound was really an important thing that played throughout the building because one of the common components of all the works that we showed was a very strong sound element. It created a multilayered experience that was a different way of embracing the space than it would otherwise have been had it not been there. But The Tank is such a symbolic image for the Western view of China, and indeed the Chinese view of themselves.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

For Yang Fudong we show his extraordinary seven intellectuals. The whole Battersea Power Station was also the setting of a number of new media works. This amazing new generation of film makers and video artists from China were shown mostly for the first time in London.

*(Slide)* The exhibition included many exhibitions within the exhibition, in which we involved Chinese curators and writers as protagonists by contributing a number of their own shows within the show. One is the Ou Ning sound environment; the other one is from Pi Li, a Chinese curator together with Waling Boers, who developed the Universal Shops, which was a section of the exhibition exploring artists' multiples and a kind of temporary autonomous zone.

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

It was also a way to play with a different scale: on the one hand the epic size of the Power Station, and on the other the smaller scale of the Toyo Ito Pavilion, bought by the owner of Battersea Power Station and resited there, which doubled as a café. One of the

concerns was also to be able to get objects to England. They all arrived in the same size cardboard box for display in the Ito Pavilion and this space was effective as a shop as well as a curatorial project.

*(Slide)* We're back to the Serpentine for a recent exhibition of the Damien Hirst Murderme collection, and this piece is by Sarah Lucas on the lawn of the gallery, which is an enlarged version of one of those little knick-knacks that perhaps some of you might have had as children; I certainly did. And one of the things that we do in thinking about the footprint of the institution – this work of art is sited on the same place as the Pavilion is during the summer months. It's a very small bit of grass and when the Pavilion is taken away, it's always astounding to me how the reality of space can expand and contract. Our annual architecture commission marks a 350 square meter footprint, and being in the Royal Parks, we have certain privileges but also certain obligations. One of them is that we can only use the outside of the gallery in a relatively sparing way due to the considerations of our landlord and the great emphasis they put on the grass in the park.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Moving on. Another view with Sarah Lucas in the Serpentine. There is also expansion, where we use very big signs, and then back to the Serpentine gallery. It's expansion and then back to concentration. Can we go to the next slide?

#### Julia Peyton-Jones

This is the current show of Karen Kilimnik, where again, we played with the site of the building and played with its four rooms. She wanted to transform them into a very different sort of Mise en scene...

This is her recreation of the great country house, Ragley Hall, which in this scale looks quite generous in proportions but was installed in one of the smallest spaces in the gallery.



### **Hans Ulrich Obrist**

This show is on right now, so we'd like to invite you all to come to London and see this show over the next couple of weeks. Yes, maybe we could leave it to questions and conclude by saying that we are unbelievably excited to be in Dubai and further our research, which we will continue over the next month very intensely in the Middle East, which hopefully will lead to a Middle East project in London.

### **Julia Peyton-Jones**

The reason that we wanted to make the slides to go quite quickly after those showing in the Karen Kilimnik show, was to give you yet another perspective of how the Serpentine, the inside of the Serpentine, can be used in quite extraordinary and unexpected ways. So if there are any questions, we will be pleased to answer them and if there aren't, thank you very much.

### **Maria Finders**

Thank you so much for staying on. We are adjourning our day, and we encourage you all to go over to the Gulf Art Fair. For those who are VIPs to the opening, this evening; tomorrow it will be open for the general public.

Tomorrow morning we have a very interesting debate, which will be about the next ten years of contemporary art within the Middle East. We have a fantastically huge panel, and it opens at promptly 10.30 in the morning. For those who are going to party all night, think about tomorrow morning 10.30 here.

Thank you.

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Middle East Focus

## The next ten years of contemporary art in the Middle East

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10.30–12.00

Saleh Barakat, Art Expert, Beirut, LB.

Camilla Cañellas, International Arts

Consultant, Writer and Critic, Barcelona, ES.

Bassam El-Baroni, Art Critic, Curator, EG.

Hassan Khan, Editor, Bidoun, Cairo, EG.

Jack Persekian, Director Sharjah Biennial,

Curator, Founder and Director of Anadiel

Gallery and Al-Ma'mal Foundation for

Contemporary Art in Jerusalem.

Tirdad Zolghadr, Curator, Zurich, CH.

**Moderator** Vasif Kortun, Curator, Director,  
Platform Garanti, Istanbul, TR.

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Vasif Kortun

Hope you are all feeling fine this morning as we all are. This is going to be mostly extempore, without very long presentations. One thing I'd like to start with is the question of public space. Let me rephrase this: What are the sine qua non conditions of contemporary art?

From the production and to the consumption and the sharing and the discourse, but what is the minimum we need? How are these minimum conditions met in various places of the region? First of all the term, “Middle East” of course is an oxymoron; the Gulf is very different from let’s say the South East Mediterranean, which is very different from South of Spain and there is nothing that really ties it all together in a coherent form. Some places are extremely urbanized and some are not; some places are being engineered to be urbanized, now and in the future and some places are not. What we traditionally seem to call public space and how it exists in various parts of the region is really up for negotiation because public space is also the space of the anonyma and we can actually debate if such an anonyma exists. If the streets are dirty this is not because people are dirty but because the street is the “other” space and urban space is a space that you do not actually appropriate as part of your regular life.

I was talking to an architect about where public space begins and he took a paper tissue from his pocket and threw it on the ground in front of him and said that’s where public space begins. How does the notion of public space affect the discourse and production of contemporary art? Tirdad, I know that you have issues with what I say about what public space is and how it could be utilised at this moment. So would you speak about that and the region?

#### Tirdad Zolghadr

Yes, we briefly spoke about the issue of public space just recently, and I do have a slightly different take on it. But just quickly, I appreciated what you said about the Middle East being an oxymoron, and as Hassan sitting to the right of me said in his statement, it’s become very tedious to hear people complaining about the terminology of Middle East and so forth. But nonetheless, the Middle East has a certain history. It’s a bit like the term, *Habitus*, and the whole idea of the *Habitus* doesn’t really have a proper referent. One can use the term *Habitus* to impose a certain kind of disposition on people to the point that when they use the term *Habitus*, they adopt a certain kind of

mentality, which is then fostered in the room, creating a certain kind of intellectual atmosphere. The use of the term “Middle East” is a bit like this. There’s something a little eerie when it is used with such ease, when it goes down like potato chips because it does have a history that’s fraught with all sorts of problems.

The danger of using public space as a *sine qua non* sort of something that art would hinge on to is that traditionally Europe likes to think of itself as a continent which has fostered public spaces and that’s where – the Agora – all these free subjects gather to speak their opinions freely. I think you don’t have to be Foucault to realize that this kind of public space never really existed. So when you combine this ideal notion of public space with the term “Middle East,” it becomes quite a cocktail because then you have the Middle East as the space in which it is inherently impossible for art, because it supposedly has a different attitude to public space. I mean, I think I will just start by saying that and I can add other stuff later.

#### Vasif Kortun

Hassan, if you can follow up from there, particularly because you are coming from Cairo, the most dense city, most urbanized context of the region and from Egypt which is a deep country, with a deep tradition, with a deep contextualized situation. So what is your *Habitus*?

#### Hassan Khan

Well, I’d like to take what Tirdad said and develop it and give it a slightly different spin. I think the problem with using, as you said, a term that is charged like “the Middle East” is indeed a way to construct a potentially stifling situation.

I have been thinking a lot about all this lately; however, I’ve been revising some of my earlier thoughts regarding this. I’ve been considering that it’s actually possible to start thinking about local specificities in a different way especially in Cairo, which is the city that I know best, and because it is somehow a model. I think I suddenly learned something from the city. What I want to say basically is that we can look at things which we usually see as problems, for example, the idea of public intellectuals in a city

like Cairo that are closely intertwined with a nationalist agenda and with the state. In one way or another they might be considered as morally corrupt. However, it's also possible to look at that tradition of these kinds of intellectuals and find a specificity that would counter the idea of just some kind of slick smooth constructed art event like a fair, like the Gulf Art Fair, for example.

I am trying to say that some of these ideas are contradictory. In one way, by saying I will focus on my specificity and on my city I am going down the path of what is essential, yet at the same time it seems to be that at least in that specific context it's possible to counter certain trends and certain directions, and even a certain syntax. For example, the idea that we will speak about the next ten years in terms that implicitly demand some kind of positive future prognosis and it's possible to counter this with your problems. Your problems can be what build a relationship with this outside. These are just a few thoughts so I'll just throw them in...

#### Vasif Kortun

Thank you, Hassan. So it's obvious the next ten years of contemporary art in the Middle East, as Hassan says, produces optimism already, as it is stated. It is like saying, "Son, where are you going to be in ten years?" "I want to be an engineer, I want to be a doctor, I want to be this, and I want to do that". But these are all open agendas. If you look back over the last five years, since 2001, and kind of project moving forward, the question is, are you hopeful? If you were at the helm of the ship, because the ship is being engineered, you know, there is a moment in the construction of the next ten years where it will certainly important to be the engineer. Maybe it's not coming from the biblical sense, but it's a different kind of future that we're looking at. So how do you feel about your role in all this, and do you agree that you are part of the building process, the engineering?

#### Saleh Barakat

Well exactly. I feel we are today at the threshold because part of the Middle East is quite fashionable, and what I'm concerned

about mainly is that we should try not to focus only on the commercial aspect of art, although it's true that as an art dealer I'm very happy that art is becoming fashionable. I make more money. But at the same time as a curator and writer and collector and as a person I totally believe that art and culture are major components in the progress of any society and this is where we are engineering this today. We should keep in mind and this is capital, that art cannot bring a short-term return. Art is about a long-term commitment. This said, this is also where you can go back to debate concepts about philanthropy or patronage or public space because it is very difficult to have changes in politics or in religion. It is mainly in the world of art and culture that you can trespass the norms and make the change. And this is where we have to somehow make-believe that we need to create the incubator and to believe in art, to nurture it for the long run because eventually this is where art as an agent of change in the society can give us a return. This is where we can come back to what we have discussed yesterday about the importance of education. Education, production and mobility within the region are all important so that the art can achieve what it does best, which is surpassing the norm and creating the change.

#### Vasif Kortun

But if you would just get down to more of the specifics of the situation, I'm thinking there is amazing liquidity in the art market so there is all this cash flowing around all over the place. But how is it different from China? How is it different from India? How is it different from the emerging markets? I mean what makes Dubai different? In fact is it interesting for a society to have contemporary art and why? Is it necessary? Certainly not. But is it inevitable? No, it's not. Why is this happening now? I'm not looking at it from the side of the artist. I'm not talking about double exile, double the extreme positions. I'm not talking about where is imagination or where is this distributed, but you are also in part of that?

#### Saleh Barakat

For society to evolve it needs to be creative and for the time being creativity is more highly valued. I totally believe that in the past



ten years there was somehow a fusion between the economic imaginary and the fact that the entrepreneur needed to be creative to rise above the crowd. Today, somehow the artists are becoming champions of innovation because I believe that they can be a model for everybody. But then again I am not referring here to the speculative part of the art market, and this is where I believe the threshold is. We should be concerned about where all this will be in the next ten years because this liquidity and buying and selling, creating a fashion is not being invested in long term incubators, schools, publications, art critics, people who can read, write, and all the instruments for making art.

#### Vasif Kortun

Thank you, Saleh. Bassam, what do you think about this? Is the “institutionalization” of contemporary art, for example having the schools, setting up structures and so on and so forth, part of what you see as a process? Because you come from a town, from a city that has seen a massive change with new institutions popping up etc.

#### Bassam El-Baroni

Well, I think actually speaking today, we can't be that optimistic but in the long-term I think it's a very promising case. When we talk about contemporary art we really have to get back to art as having its origins within a larger ideology, which is culture, and culture is institutions, and people. Future artists in the region really need to understand this idea that culture is fabricated in general and that its fabrication and implementation throughout the so-called Middle East has taken different shapes and different forms. Contemporary art in each specific locality at this point in the Middle East is a product of the fabricated culture that took part in each locality. So I think, right now in the Middle East, in general there are various forms of not wanting to be very theoretical or exhaustive in terms of “politics” for lack of a better word. But I think they have reached a point where in some areas the post-modernist trend is being exhausted and people need to go beyond this, while other areas opposing colonialist attitude is being exhausted and people also need to go beyond this. What's particularly interesting about the buying of art in the post-

modern cities in the Arab region is that it's not particularly based in the idea of culture itself. What's also interesting is that people can actually start from very different starting points and they don't have to work “asymmetrically” against different nationalisms, different, already constructed, institutional practices throughout the region.

#### Vasif Kortun

We will come back to that, but I'm still stuck on this idea of something that's been crafted with a birth date which is worth talking about I think. Camilla, you've done a lot of work in the region before a lot of people were coming in to work, so can you just reflect back a little to the beginnings for you and also tell us a bit about how you see the future?

#### Camilla Cañellas

My reflections obviously have a UK perspective but I think a number of the issues that need to be addressed are not necessarily related to the art market, but related to how artists in the region exist within the market and what the future holds for them. In many ways it goes back to this notion of more grass roots, infrastructure and more organic ways of working. I think we need to be wary of the big kind of bricks and mortar capital projects, the Bilbao effect. And while all this is great and very successful, and you know they certainly created a cultural identity and a magnet for tourists, but beyond this, inside the walls, what is there for the local art scene or for developing contemporary art practice? In reality one has to think about this. And I think certainly in the UK we've learned a lot of lessons from the (National) lottery and the opportunities it brought to build a huge numbers of projects and fantastic facilities. But in many cases this was really just about creating wallpaper; art as a background for a great café or a nice place to have a meeting and a number of them have failed. I mean millions of pounds have been spent but there is just no audience. I think the public in the end is the issue we need to look at, art and its intrinsic value and the fact that artists and art have a role within a civil society and how that sort of need and development can be further nurtured. I think also, one of the things I'm kind of interested in is the

fickleness of the art world. When one looks at the last ten years in the region, there's been a lot of very interesting work happening and this is not just in the last couple of years, but for quite some time. It's only now that shows are being curated and the big institutions are coming. In fact on a trip I organised to Lebanon and Egypt a couple of years ago, of all the UK curators only one had ever been to the Arab Middle East and that was on holiday to Sharm El Sheikh. These were international curators. Part of what's going on is that this is a fashion, and that's something that we must also be aware along with the fact that the art market has a very promiscuous way of working. You only have to think of Eastern Europe in the early 1990s after the fall of the Iron Curtain. There was this great interest, a lot of work was done, a lot stayed in the region and then suddenly a lot of things were happening elsewhere, a bit more exciting, so the artists were left a bit high and dry there, and some of them are only now receiving recognition, which they have long deserved. These are some of the issues I feel we need to remember now. There is a huge amount of potential here, in Dubai, and its sort of role of platform is very interesting, and I feel it needs to be taken responsibly when considering how it develops in the market and as a market, and within a wider context in contemporary art practice.

#### Vasif Kortun

Thank you Camilla. Jack, have you been involved in two projects over the years, one being Executive Director of the Sharjah Biennial which opens next month, and the other one is creation of CAMP, the Contemporary Arts in Palestine which has a non-resident collection in an institution without a building for the moment. You went at it in a different way, working in Jerusalem and actually also in inviting many fantastic artists, mostly from Europe and the States over the last twelve years or more, and establishing an interesting collection where nothing of the sort was being thought of. Can you speak about that and I really would like to know where CAMP stands at this moment and where will CAMP go?

#### Jack Persekian

Thank you. Yes, I think the experience of working in Jerusalem is a context for growth of course. Maybe one of the points I wanted to bring to the table here, to this discussion about the future of contemporary art, is the importance of the political context of the region and the places we work with. Of course I'm thinking that sometimes it's not one sided; it's very disparate, so working in that particular place under those particular circumstances, Palestine has somehow taught me and taught the people in general in the art world how to go about it. The whole tendency of working with artists mainly from Europe or from America, from the West, if I may say, was somehow to bring recognition of our activities. But it always has been for me a very humbling experience in a sense that we've often worked with artists with very little means, where conditions for production are difficult. Visiting artists had to give up all the privileges that they see here in this part and other parts of the world and so that in a sense this has somehow been reflected on the Sharjah experience.

CAMP came as a very natural development of projects that I worked on in Jerusalem, stemming from the fact that all this work that has been done over the years. It was also important to see how these projects have documented history and the situation we live in from an artist's perspective. For me there was a pressing need to bring the work together and that the work be preserved and be documented.

The fact that I proposed the idea of CAMP as a collection without a building and without a museum also comes from the fact that we can't afford it. We don't have the land; we don't have control over the land. We don't have a country yet and we don't have the money. The whole idea was that there is this collection, and then we thought: why don't we start by lending it? So, for the time being we are waiting for one museum maybe or an institution or any of the other institutions I've been talking to say, "Yes, we will house the collection, we will put it in our storage facility", until the day we will get the means to create the building.

### Vasif Kortun

Thank you. Bassam just a question, Camilla mentioned promiscuity but placed with curators on the market side. Is promiscuity limited in the region at the moment in terms of where we stand or is there larger promiscuity going on?

### Bassam El-Baroni

Actually I wanted to make a point rather than answer that question. I mean after listening to everyone making their statements, I think that maybe what is important is that one positive thing can come out of a context like that. Although it can be quite critical, it might be important to focus on how we are actually discussing these things.

What Tirdad said about power words like “Middle East” and earlier what you said about “charged words” are important because words frame things in a specific way.

Maybe it’s important to be very sensitive to that in our interaction. Maybe it is true that curators are coming and it is true that they are making regional shows – I mean I would propose a ban on regional shows personally – but if you want to engage with people working in a specific location that happen to be geographically sensitive, if we want to have some say in that relationship then it becomes necessary to infiltrate that discourse through different methods. Whether it’s how you conduct a meeting or whether it’s the way you shake someone’s hand, whatever way you do it, it’s necessary to build that relationship and in my opinion, rejecting what’s happening locally and globally is being, as was discussed before, “engineered”. This is also reflected in the art industry.

I think it’s important to reject that in a specific fashion, not in terms of absolute rejection but rather in the sense of allowing for an infiltration or subversion or taking back. I would like to point out that a term like “threshold” is used as were words like “civil society” and “development” and I think that it’s important to ask what these words actually say about what we’re doing. These words are used all the time and they imply something specific about this location. My argument is that these implications play

consciously or unconsciously into the broader picture and the bigger story.

### Vasif Kortun

Just to follow up with that, maybe we could discuss the notion of rejection as it implies a kind of binary relationship? As you are still one part of this transaction can we undo that altogether?

### Bassam El-Baroni

Yes, that’s why I said I’m using the word “rejection” but it’s not an absolute rejection. It’s a necessity; it’s a strategic rejection, and it’s a necessary moment which is how I see it.

### Tirdad Zolghadr

I wanted to quickly respond to what Saleh was saying about the inability of art. I would agree that it is inevitable that in a sense every society has something that you can potentially pick out and call art and that way it is inevitable whether it’s an installation or a mast that you can pose this sort of discourse. But if you look at it closely, if you look at the different practitioners sitting here, you will see that even within the term “arts” there are huge differences. The only common denominator is really the actual public space that we are creating here with this panel and this is something becomes quite fundamental. So, you were talking about how art from the Middle East has become fashionable. Art from other places has become fashionable too and what always happens is that you have the boom and then you have certain gatekeepers that move into place.

I think it’s hard enough to talk about the Middle East. Just yesterday we were having a round-table discussion where we felt like Le Corbusier; we were asked to design the future of Dubai as a cultural hub and we felt like we were in some kind of computer game like Sim City where you just get down and construct things. I thought the responsibility was terrifying enough so I don’t know. I’m not going to talk about other regions but I do have the feeling that in the Middle East, when I use the term Middle East I do feel the Middle East exists just like Europe exists or democracy exists or public space exists, and these are all concepts with a lot of force. The problem is that there are certain gatekeepers and curators in

Europe who are expected to come to terms with art coming from weird “twilight zones” and they have to make sense of it and they have to make it consumable to their public and so they rely on intermediaries. When it comes to places like the Middle East, there are very few credible intermediaries, so power is disproportionately concentrated within the hands of very few people who have this kind of claim to act as representatives, and so obviously it’s not necessarily the most intellectually daring or audacious or let’s just say non-Machiavellian who get their foot in the door.

Maybe one way of dealing with this is to use places like Dubai since we were brain-storming about this yesterday, and I was mentioning this to Hassan, that Dubai very pragmatically can work as a hub that is a gateway not between East and West but as a pragmatic space where all these debates to occur. Although apparently one of the theorists couldn’t come because of his passport, I assume that it’s easier to travel here for many people in the region than it is to travel to Paris or to London. So maybe on a very pragmatic level, Dubai can become a space, a hub where a certain critical mass can develop of transactions happening between these countries.

#### Vasif Kortun

This notion of gate keeping does come up, because in the old days it used to be the ministry that nobody referred to because they could not be trusted to begin with, so that was always a closed gate that you just did not refer to and other than that difference you could not actually pinpoint the people on the ground in the places to actually speak to them. I remember in 1989 Yann Martel was trying to do this, and his whole idea was to bypass the traditional, the classical gatekeeper, the ministries of culture or the provincial modernist elite that you know, and he just went through them and tried to reach the “real” which was a kind of silly idea. But he promise of bypassing institutions, classic institutional gatekeepers, was actually an interesting and good idea. Now it seems like we have these gatekeepers who are actually speaking pretty much the same language as those who are coming to knock on the doors. Could you comment on that, because I rely on your experience a lot.

#### Camilla Cañellas

Yes I think it’s interesting because it was only ten years ago that a lot of countries were dealing with cultural agreements which meant signing neutral things basically saying, “we will take a show of art to our major national gallery, and you take a show of British art to yours”. That’s how crude it was, but things have moved a huge amount in those years and I mean certainly cultural institutions like the British Council have woken up finally to the fact that they can’t sit in their offices in London and decide that Peru gets Damien Hirst and Iran gets Henry Moore and so on.

The local knowledge on the ground has been recognized as being key to these organizations’ futures and legitimacy in what they do and thank goodness we are now seeing arts officers engaged locally in countries to actually decide and develop exhibition programmes and policies. So, hopefully we’re moving away from the sort of colonialist notion of where art should go and what artists should be showing.

But in terms of gatekeepers, I think it’s an interesting area because on the one hand people want to know more about what’s going on in the region and about contemporary art practice, coming from often zero knowledge, but there is still sometimes a defensiveness about the fact that they are asking at all, because maybe they have taken too long to be interested or suddenly there is this sense that they are coming with a very crude perspective. But in the end it’s always better to ask. Of course there is the danger that they then are made to feel ignorant and this often makes people step back and away from any possible projects that they might develop.

One of the things that really frustrates me as a non-curator, but as someone who has worked within the arts sector for many years and worked as a funder and policy developer, is the fact that co-curatorial collaborations, the genuine collaborations between a curator in a major institution and a freelance curator, working in a particular locality or context, are really quite few and far between and it’s something which seems so obvious. I can remember there was a show in London. The Arab Image Gallery



did a show with Akram as co-curator, and with a curator there at the gallery and it seemed so obvious and it made so much sense, but I also remember the way artists were because the artist arrived in London like a celebrity artist and didn't speak a word of English. He had to be navigated through this rather strange situation he found himself in. Without someone who actually came from that sort of context and that particular background, the situation would have actually been far worse. I think it's something for the western institutions to recognize, that they can still have control over what they are doing and how they programme work and still work more collaboratively. I think collaboration helps get away from this notion of the gatekeepers because there are many people out there that are working and could be possible partners.

#### **Jack Persekian**

Yes, I think there is also a polarizing notion in this whole idea of gatekeeping, but I also see that at the other end of it is also a certain kind of facilitation. I would perhaps compare it to when you are doing a book or a magazine and you have the editors, and there is always some sort of filtering process involved. This also happens when you are creating products or presentations that will go into the public domain and the filtering process that they go through. So in this sense you need to think about that and these two functions, gatekeeping and facilitation, and of course always be aware of that role or that person. I wouldn't see it from a European or a western perspective; I think that notion applies to everyone even people working from here or who live here.

#### **Saleh Barakat**

Well also about the gatekeeping: this is why it is very important for the next year to talk about and involve people in this concept of what the French would call mécènes or patronage because it is only by introducing corporations and individuals who have the assets and are willing to invest it in artistic ventures to better understand what needs to be done. It is important to inspire investors to give to some people whose work is about thinking, the people who work on the writing of the conceptual framework of understanding because otherwise the societies will not evolve.

I mean, to give a metaphor, Europe somehow was built on this idea on the respect and support of knowledge, where you had monks in a monastery writing and studying, but in order for those few people to be able to produce knowledge based work, there were 200 or 300 people working the land and money from that production went back to the monastery. There is a lot of excess cash in the Middle East but which can somehow be invested in the "production" of knowledge which will keep society evolving. This is where all this can become very interesting.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

A few months ago there was an article in the New York Times and it was about a press conference that took place in Abu Dhabi. The scene is like this: Dennis Hopper gets off from his motorcycle and he's followed by Laurence Fishbourne and a bunch of other important characters, all getting off their motorcycles after a tour and Hopper says; "You know, Abu Dhabi is the Florence of the 21st Century". Now that's a bold statement to make and Hassan could you address this? Let's think about this, because if it is so, we are still going back to this notion of engineering. How would you compare Abu Dhabi of the 21st Century to the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance? Would this be in terms of using patronage today to induce a new culture for contemporary art? It can induce collecting but collecting and building and making institutions has very little to do with contemporary art in fact. You can have one without the other, and they don't come together in a package, but maybe we assume that they should come together in a package. Not that it isn't interesting, because we are looking at something which is almost unknowable at the same time and so what do you think of this notion of patronage today and can we compare of course?

#### **Hassan Khan**

Important? Yes. I think it's important to be really clear: there is a difference between buying things and producing things. This may simply be an impression and I can only speak about my personal impressions, but I suspect that this place is about buying things rather than producing them. That's why in the very

beginning of this panel discussion I threw up the idea that maybe our problems can also be our solutions. I specifically referred to morally corrupt intellectuals in Cairo who, for example, work with the state. Traditions may be problematic in some ways, but at the same time traditions ensure that things have a certain depth, that there is a density – this is an important word, density. There is a certain density and a certain tension and friction which can be productive. I mean I think that saying that a place is the “Florence of the 21st Century” is a bit of a superficial statement, so I’d like to maybe suggest referring to what we were speaking about earlier. When you take a closer look at the term “contemporary art” and treat it as an absolute term, it’s a term that immediately implies some kind of absolute that functions everywhere. So, if we take that one step further and say, okay, if that term is absolute, if we accept that friction, why not build the relationship on such terms, which would be an argument that goes against specificity and locality? At the same time I think it would be an argument that would ensure that we have equal access to the field of knowledge. What’s important is not just the object or the credit, but also the access to an actual field of knowledge and that I think is only possible if the relationship is actually conceptually thought through. Maybe one way of dealing with this is to use places like Dubai since we were brain storming about this yesterday, and I was mentioning this to Hassan, that Dubai very pragmatically can work as a hub that is a gateway not between East and West but as a pragmatic space where all these debates to occur. Although apparently one of the theorists couldn’t come because of his passport, I assume that it’s easier to travel here for many people in the region than it is to travel to Paris or to London. So maybe on a very pragmatic level, Dubai can become a space, a hub where a certain critical mass can develop of transactions happening between these countries.

#### **Saleh Barakat**

Yes, but this access to a field of knowledge, who is it dictated by? And I think that this is really the question and what will this dictation imply and what ideologies and what needs and what demands are being proposed by the person or the whole

framework dictating these issues. I think this is something that is very important. You were also talking about the corrupt Egyptian situation, and I totally agree with you but this is a very specific situation and it also does have a link between socialism and I think at this point, in advanced capitalism. Sometimes we do get a bit romantic about socialism and perhaps this is all part of our identity. I think, however, the whole notion of how these identity politics were formed and how they can be formed in places like Dubai and Kuwait is what we should be questioning.

#### **Hassan Khan**

I will just say very quickly, that I understand all this, but what I was trying to say was that in the present state of things; even morally corrupt intellectuals can be our salvation. I’m not exactly trying to say that per se, I’m trying to say that as much as surface and glitz and shine play a certain role in all this, so does history, including corruption, including a socialism that never was, of course. I’m not romantic about this at all but the density of a crowd walking in the street, and how that kind of density plays itself in relation to the surface produces a kind of symbiotic and organic relationship.

#### **Tirdad Zolghadr**

About this question of who is going to decide how knowledge is produced and distributes, and who has access to which kind of archives, it goes back to what I was saying before. I’m based in Berlin right now and every other dinner table conversation leads into someone explaining the Middle East to me. Explaining what the problems are and what the solutions are and it actually sounds very easy: there’s a, b and then there’s c. So these problems that are incredibly convoluted to people in situ become these extremely candy-coated and sexy things to bring up and then to unravel and we all know that the Middle East offers this kind of oratory surplus.

You know this would be a very cynical response to what you were saying about turning our problems into our solutions, but also part of the veneer of the Middle East is this political attraction. But I wanted to say something completely different about the

corrupt Egyptian institution. I don't know much about Egypt let alone their corrupt institutions, but having studied at the University of Geneva, I know that the most reactionary backwater can still offer a very interesting place to produce work and very often this kind of contrast is actually necessary. I know that's a very dangerous thing to say and I know it can be very romantic. You can romanticize the struggling dissident, you know the creative potential of censorship and all that, that's the danger but on the other hand, if you think of it that way it helps to de-mythologize the fact that a lot of artists are working under difficult circumstances.

#### Hassan Khan

But my point is that it channels creativity into binary relationships as opposed to what I was saying earlier here. I mean this could never ever have happened because policies like we were talking about a little bit earlier really depend on whose going to make the decisions. In the end there are going to be mistakes and culture is culture and this is how history is formed. I think part of the situation of the Middle East is based on the fact that creativity is being channeled into opposing this kind of opposition. For me, we should be able to go beyond this point and then it becomes interesting and then the opposition or the imagined opposition can really feel genuine empathy not just based on a fixed terminology.

#### Tirdad Zolghadr

But hasn't it reached that point. Wouldn't it be more productive to actually point out the brutality of the still-existing hierarchy, that also exists in the West rather than assuming that there is a level playing field?

#### Saleh Barakat

I'm sorry I didn't really get it.

#### Tirdad Zolghadr

I wanted to shift the conversation a bit – where the idea that if in the coming ten years the money that is being invested here in the Gulf to build the biggest building and the biggest hotel, and with that of course the biggest museums, as part of the general decor,

this will definitely lead to a crash. But my point is, how can we convince of a society here that transforming Dubai into a platform that can produce a culture for an emerging world that goes from maybe the sub-continent, from India and East Africa to the Middle East, leading to a production that comes as a major component in building a society? This would be a real challenge.

#### Vasif Kortun

We'll assume in a way that every place needs everything, I'm just looking at the examples of Southeast Europe and Eastern Europe. For the time being, there are no symbolic institutions that carry the history of, for example, Southeast Europe, so there is no singular place where it is crystallized. In Kosovo the art scene is amazingly active, completely crazy, and it's a fantastic situation. Tirana was also like this a few years ago before it kind of collapsed... or not really collapsed but it subsided. While our focus today is not there, if ever you wanted to see an interesting collection of the history of Southeast Europe at the moment you have to go to the Estaban collection, which is based in Vienna. You can also discover more about the Viennese art scene, although I'd rather look at Zagreb, which for me is much more interesting than the Vienna scene or Kosovo or Pristina or wherever. But in Vienna it all comes together because Vienna, Austria has a political stake in Southeast Europe, it always has. Also, because there's no more Yugoslavia, there are no symbolic institutions that would carry the former Yugoslav art. What I'm just coming about in a roundabout way is that I guess we would not have such a discussion in Cairo for example, about what we would be doing in the next ten years.

#### Hassan Khan

That is a discussion that I don't think I'm interested in having as such.

#### Vasif Kortun

But we will assume the best of all worlds would be that you would not regard this site as a production site but as a site where things could be stored and preserved and collected and sold.

**Hassan Khan**

That's a possibility but what I'm trying to say is if this space situates itself like that, that's fine and it will serve a function in terms of market and circulation etc. But it's just important not to keep some level in other spaces. I mean if we are now speaking about the economic model in which a place like Dubai needs to be a place that situates itself outside a specific history and density; it needs to be surface, to be able to function as a hub of commerce in a sense, that's all fine, that's part of circle. But it is then important for other centres which are centres of production and that the relationship with that hub has to be thought out.

**Vasif Kortun**

In terms of a leveling field...

**Tirdad Zolghadr**

Can I ask the moderator a question?

**Vasif Kortun**

Yes.

**Tirdad Zolghadr**

You were telling us in your moderator statement that you were describing, if I understood you correctly, that in Istanbul – speaking about other spaces of production – you were caught between the nostalgia for a bygone Istanbul and the new Istanbul, which is turning into something which is heavily commercialized, and you used various adjectives. I was wondering if you could give us that perspective, which might be helpful.

**Vasif Kortun**

First of all, there was a moment about five or six years ago when we were able to operate in the city without a regularising art market and large institutions etc. We were not a “main stream institution”, we were not an “alternative institution”, we were not an “initiative” and we were “not a museum”. We were not about being, we were about doing. So, we were able to find a particular position in the city and energise a certain context which turned out well and set the pace. Now my institution is being forced to be categorized within a set of another institution. There are artists'

initiatives now; there are museums – the filtering place. I mean that's one aspect, but there are other changes. Suddenly just in the last few years, these people who I've known for years, young and old with absolutely no interest in art, suddenly are becoming collectors, going to Basel for a special dinner given by an investment bank and rubbing shoulders with hedge-fund managers and getting into this other kind of scheme. I mean, where did that come from? And where were they a few years ago? What happened? Were they struck by lightning?

One positive aspect of this is that there is a growing interest in art, so things do go right sometimes. And maybe sometimes things go right, but I doubt it. Putting that aside, I think it's also a conceptual “blatantness” you know. The anxiety of feeling like you are extremely late produces this speed of action, and maybe that's what's going on at the moment. I'm shocked. I mean last year there was Picasso and this year it's Rodin, then it's this and it's that; it's publicity banners and the whole city is literally transformed...we got it too! I think it's a kind of pathetic feeling actually to think that the kitschified concept of Picasso can make a city a city today. Frankly who needs that? So people get tickets to see a Picasso road-show rather than going for the art, and this has nothing to do with the value of the artists or of the work, it has to do with the kitschified universalizing cognition of “good taste” and “value”. In the end, we will all become part of this kind of boring universalistic discourse.

There was a moment a few years ago where things were a bit different and there was a kind of hope, because the market had not yet materialized in such a swift way... I don't think we can hold the market accountable for all the ills of today's art world, but it demands so much attention. And I feel we need all the other factors in place for it to kick off and all the other factors were obviously ready to go.

**Hassan Khan**

I think this might just have something to do with an oppositional thing; coming from this notion that in the so-called Middle East, we inherited this kind of model to look up to, model of



cosmopolitanism. I think it's very important that this model be dissected and discussed here in Dubai. Is this the same "cosmopolitan" model that this nation wants to adopt? Or is it going to be a fight against this model? How can we formulate some ideas about this? I'd like Tirdad to give me his opinion about this.

#### **Tirdad Zolghadr**

Do you mean how we re-formulate it?

Yes, maybe, that's the same sort of Masonic situation that you are throwing me into and that I was thrust into yesterday morning. I don't, as this one arts journalist said, wear a hat and I'm not Joseph Beuys, I don't have manifestos, I don't have solutions that would point to...

#### **Hassan Khan**

I don't mean necessarily re-formulating the model, but I just wanted your remarks on this notion.

#### **Tirdad Zolghadr**

Well, what I think might be very useful is on the one hand we try to find a positive attitude towards quantity, as Rem Koolhaas was saying at one point. I know it's very cheesy when curators quote Rem Koolhaas but it's very useful just now. Because otherwise there's this constant trap of reducing or reprimanding various sites for not having the same approach to density or to memory or to art or history as we know it from the old Florence, for example. So right now what is pretty difficult and dicey is the fact that you would have to come up with aesthetic categories which do not have that prescriptive force, which is one extremely abstract suggestion that might hold value. But don't think it's so abstract. In fact, I seriously think it has to do with language. It's a matter of how you consciously frame what you're saying and I don't think that this is abstract.

#### **Hassan Khan**

I don't think it is abstract. It has to do with language.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

May I just open to the floor. Do you have any questions?

#### **Audience**

This is a city that is monumental, and I would hope that this would be channeled in the right way, and not only in the commercial way. This is a big burden and a big challenge for the people here, and beyond enthusiasm, a lot of reflection and thought will be required to establish structures in an appropriate way.

#### **Hassan Khan**

I think Dubai will most likely become the commercial art centre of the Middle East, with artists coming from around the larger or wider region. I mean it's the only logical role that it could play but the hope is that in the long term, this will be the instigator of more friction that will actually create something here and spur on creativity, and I think this is possible.

#### **Bassam El-Baroni**

I think that while at the moment it's quite clear that the commercial aspect will be the dominant one, but I don't know whether it will be the only thing happening here. I hope Dubai will welcome the plurality of the region and that the infrastructures here will not just look at galleries or studios and fellowships, but also to encourage art colleges to open up and have exchanges with art colleges elsewhere. Also that greater encouragement needs to be given to young emerging curators here; I mean the idea of curatorial training is something that's new and that needs to be developed.

It's also very important to establish a voice for the people here. Young critics are also a vital group worth investing in. Magazines and other publications will also be playing an important role in the dissemination of information and as platforms for intellectual debate.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

Yes, I think that in Dubai there is a political will, as is the case in Turkey to move things forward. Culture does have implications in the political world. There are political reasons for doing something about opening up towards the West and finding alternative ways of communicating and of course alternative

markets. Also, this means finding new ways for business and commerce to move forward, and many people out there want to be part of this. For example, if I had not been able to join this panel, it is sure someone else would have jumped at the chance to take my place. So yes, there is this drive by the top decision makers to begin navigating through important and complicated issues related to development, because there are many proposals to begin dealing with, ranging from establishing these big museums to art fairs, to small galleries which are now popping up here and there and everybody is trying. This brings up the question of who will be the public that all this development is being designed for, and how committed they will be to the process? Also, Dubai has a very mobile population thus there can be big fluctuations in the audience.

#### **Tirdad Zolghadr**

The idea of audiences as mobile and the audiences that stay also includes a large immigrant population of a different kind of economic access point. In the next ten years, will important changes occur in terms of production and dissemination as new audiences are given access? How can this “show window” reach out more and make a bigger impact on the region in terms of creating new audiences.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

Serious questions; that also doubles up with the question of the transition of this place from “a zero friction zone” to a “public space”.

#### **Tirdad Zolghadr**

I would say there must be a vision of being able to produce an art from here, nurture it here and watch it grow here. Artists can come and spend some time here in residencies and work with artists who were born here. Some clear thinking needs to be done about providing the right education, and speaking up about this multi-cultural cosmopolitan place. Maybe we can then see an art that can really be more global growing here, and that can reach more people in the region.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

Would anybody like to make any closing remarks?

#### **Jack Persekian**

I just wanted to reflect on the last question from the Sharjah Biennial perspective. Thinking about what’s happening and for example reading the papers today in the morning, I didn’t see the English papers, but I did see all the Arabic papers, and there was nothing about the art fair. And by nothing I mean, not a single thing. It reminds me how difficult it was with the Sharjah Biennial for us to figure out how we could create this public space and how we could attract people and we tried through different ways to achieve this. One successful thing I would say we did was working with the Minister of Education and through that collaboration the Ministry is bringing students of all ages to the Biennial. So if you think about it, it’s more like a supply that is creating a demand. So the Gulf Art Fair and the Sharjah Biennial and all the other activities that are taking place are basically offering new formats for people to interact and for people to get closer to art and find this moment of “friction”. I think that with time there is enough knowledge and education being built into the system and people are starting to see the benefits and slowly the press is also picking up on it. For example, last year before the Biennial we had to literally write the articles for the papers, they didn’t even have the energy or the enthusiasm...

#### **Vasif Kortun**

...but that’s everywhere... (laughter)

#### **Jack Persekian**

...So we are dealing with this kind of situation...

#### **Vasif Kortun**

Jack, to end on a positive note, I see a lot of optimism in that because most of the city here has been built for people who are coming in and who are not necessarily here yet. So eventually one day all these museums and all these activities will be creating the supply that will create the demand. I mean, this worked in real-estate, so why not in the art world?

### Jack Persekian

Just as we close I think basically we can't quite over-prophesize nor should we, and since we are not decision makers either we can still set the measure of success and remain very ambiguous. Things should go the "normal" way; yes there will be the museum and yes there will be a very strong art market, there will be a burgeoning arts scene, there will be good education and institutions and all of that. But perhaps what is really interesting still lies in what cannot be imagined, so when you think about the next ten years, for example, Dubai might actually become extremely interesting not because of the institutions, not because of the museums but because of this kind of weird experiment, this strange laboratory because it has the means of engage with what is unimaginable. That's all I want to say.

### Bassam El Baroni

Yes, I just want to say it's a very good attitude but also it's very problematic because we really have to ask a lot of questions and culture is not some PR dinosaur running ahead. It really has to be analyzed and dissected in every which way for it to take on a good shape, so while I think that all this is very promising, I also think that more critical viewpoints need to be taken, deeper consideration, under the microscope, because culture can be very dangerous really. It can be very dangerous.

### Tirdad Zolghadr

I wanted to second what you were saying. It's really true because otherwise what you see is development as an arts industry which functions like an Italian opera, a sort of spectacle that never offers you a glimpse behind the scenes and that never questions its own paradigms of performance. I think that this is the flipside of course, trying to maximize the numbers of retinas which see the art is one thing but the other thing is the ethics of professionalism which dominate our work. That's another thing where honestly, as I said earlier, the highest potential lies in the fact that Dubai can become a potential hub for a panel like this. Everyone knows it's a kind of watering hole, of people who never get to see each other; otherwise get to see each other on a panel such as this maybe that's a good point to end on.

### Audience

Just a somewhat belated question and it will sound very old fashioned, but I guess what I find would also be important in terms of this kind of discussion is actually the contribution that the artists make themselves in terms of their work. It's not to say anything against what the panelists have said, and they've experienced but it's really to find a way in which to make a kind of sensitive counterpoint. For me the negative potential of market and the negative potential of the glib governing initiatives of big scale institutions and museums affect art. If one is to talk about the construction of certain imaginaries which are produced by the government or produced by the market or produced by the media, it seems to me also that the artists are producing and making a significant contribution to that kind of imaginary. If I think about Hassan's work, his extraordinary four channel video hidden location seemed to me precisely the contribution as to how to understand this idea of density and the idea of intersection of voices and points of view from within Cairo. I think it would be a shame if the art fair wasn't able in the future to develop a form of dialogue which really was about the work itself, not at some separate session but actually very much a part of these sorts of discussions as well.

### Bassam El Baroni

I don't think that the arts scene or the art market can exist in a vacuum space. I really think that it should be an exchange between existing, bringing and carrying out and Dubai is still a vacuum in terms of this. Dubai does not yet have contemporary cultural roots, this takes time. I mean look at the world, how long it took for it to bring up the cultural identity. I don't think that we can talk about an art market and an arts scene if art is not being created in the place and without artists producing in a place where pioneers or an art fair exists; forget it.

In the long term you need the art to be there and you need the controversy between the scene, the social, the political structure, freedom and the humans, the people who are here. This goes back to what Jack was saying that the papers were not reporting. We are all foreigners ; most of us are. How many in the city know

that there is an art fair taking place here? This is now a hub, it's new, and it's interesting, but carrying it on means rooting it in a scene. How long will that take? I assume longer than we think. The city of Beirut has that process happening now, and if they did not have war, Beirut would be moving quicker because there is art being created, and because we have the freedom, and we have controversial situations and always have, and there are local, important, internationally relevant, initiatives that have been taking place since the early nineties. I am talking about the Ashkal Alwan project from Christine Tohme who really is working with the city with Beirut. I am also talking about another in the city like the Arab Image Foundation, that Beirut created and that we're carrying out, so I really think that there is a chance in fact in the region. The chance of this region is getting all together the Egyptians, the Palestinians who are creating art, the Lebanese and the rest of the Arab World, and using the potentiality of petroleum wealth so that we can all unite our forces to carry culture in and out and to display it all over the Arab countries. I think this is the chance and we should all take it. Real art comes from this region and it is important to be carrying it out, but also to work with each other.

#### Tirdad Zolghadr

I just quickly wanted to point out that saying that a place like Dubai doesn't have the kind of cultural traditions which go well with an art fair, which does not mean that this country does not have any cultural roots; I think those are two very different things.

#### Audience

I'm an eternal optimist, and I've been living in Dubai now for about a year and a half, before that I was in Beirut and Cairo and you do the rounds around the region. Before I came here I was told by many informed people within the arts across the region "Forget about Dubai, there's no culture in Dubai; there's no arts in Dubai." Up here on the stage today we have got an extremely impressive panel of people, but no one who was born and bred in the United Arab Emirates. Why is there no one from Abu Dhabi sitting with you today? So I am looking forward to see that the next Global Art Forum, next year, brings the regional power houses of culture and of finance and everyone in between upstairs on that sofa. Thank you very much.



## Open stage for the middle east and south asia

.....

2.30-3.30

Sharjah Biennial 8: Jack Persekian,  
Director of the Al-Ma' Mal Foundation,  
Jerusalem, and Director, Sharjah Biennial.  
Eva Scharrer, Curator, Sharjah Biennial 8.  
Mohamed Kazem, Curator, Sharjah Biennial 8.  
Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen, Artist, Artist-in-  
residence program, Sharjah Biennial 8.

.....

Maria Finders

There is a presentation of a fantastic project that is going on about half an hour's drive from here, in the coming months, that will to be inaugurated on the 4th of April. It's the Sharjah Biennial is in its eighth edition, which means they have been doing work for many years. For those who know the Biennial, I'm sure you'll agree it's one of the most innovative and daring biennials around the world. Jack Persekian will be our host and he's going to present the team that's

going to be working with him and hopefully some of the artists' projects. Thank you very much. Jack, take it away.

Jack Persekian

Thanks Maria. The way we are going to present this afternoon is that Mahita, who is head of our communications and logistics, will be moderating this question and of course us the team. My name is Jack Persekian and I'm the Artistic Director of the Biennial. Next to me is Mohamed Kazem, one of the curators, together with Eva Scharrer who will also speak about the team. And we have Nikolaj Larsen, who is one of the artists who participated in the previous editions of the Biennial and who is now part of the team that is putting this show together. So maybe I will give it to you Eva and we can start.

Eva Scharrer

Hi there, well I just wanted to start you off. We were talking earlier today about the creation of a public realm where there can be arts, the creation of an arts scene that doesn't possibly exist and I think that may be what differentiates Sharjah from the other Biennials. It's very interesting to speak about it within an art fair as the art production element that happens in Sharjah is totally non commercial and has been for many years. So, maybe if we can start speaking from the shift when it turned from being a classical Biennial to contemporary and the three past editions.

Briefly, for those who maybe don't know anything about the Biennial, it started in 1993, on the same model of a classical Biennial like Venice and Cairo. In 2003, Hoor Al Qasimi took over as Director and changed it to a thematic, curated show.

I think one of the most important aspects of the Biennial is that it is one of the few institutions in the Arab world that engaged in production of artwork that works with artists on projects that not only financed but also presented and assisted and go through the whole process. Hoor Al Qasimi realized that this should be part and parcel of its mission. Another part of its mission was to position Sharjah, being in the Emirates and the Gulf, as a place of production in the region.

### Jack Persekian

I would like to show you a collection of images of everything and anything that I put together and it will maybe be like a background to what Sharjah Biennial number seven was. It was a starting point where issues were discussed. Maybe I want to refer to what was said this morning, “This place is becoming more like a transit place, this place is becoming like a terminal where people just pass through their life”. My first encounter with the Emirates was about location, and how I could position something in a place that seems as a transitory terminal, and I wanted to discuss all the notions of belonging and not belonging to a place, reflecting of course on the diversity of the population having so many expatriates; this also means foreign workers and the great mix of people here. How do they work in such a context? How do they feel about this place versus home and that notion of home? How do we feel about all these new developments? How do they feel about all these extra terrestrial almost kind of places? You only need to belong to anywhere to be there. So that was part of the whole discussion that I started and I wanted to engage the artists from Qatar and Sharjah and the Emirates of course.

Then that moved on to Sharjah Biennial eight and to the idea of how we affect the environment. Not only how we are dealing with the environment but how are we dealing with this social, political ecologies, the cultural ecologies of this place? How does that affect the kind of habitat, or habitus, and this of course created a lot of interest, and we had more than eighty artists participating in this Biennial.

Maybe it might be a good time for Eva to come in as she was one of the three curators working this year with Hamish Fulton, who is a Dubai based artist who probably many of you know already. Jonathan Watkins from the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham was the Chief Curator of the Biennial. Eva, you might like to speak about some of the specific works that you’ve commissioned this year.

### Eva Scharrer

Yes, sure. First I would like to mention that for myself, the Sharjah Biennial was the first occasion for me to be here and come to the

Emirates, which before seemed like an abstract place. I really had no idea what it would be like and I guess for most of the international artists we have invited probably had the same impression. I think a really important part of this Biennial is that we can invite artists to spend time here to do research.

Many artists replied very specifically to certain conditions in Sharjah, for instance, Mia Jankowicz, who was working on the issue of water. As you know, Sharjah as well as Dubai gets most of its water from the sea, which is cleaned through desalinization factories. Not everybody gets the same quality of water, so there are some problems of getting really good quality drinking water in schools and for some rural areas which are not in the centre of the cities. An artist group came here and spent a considerable amount of time here, exploring recorded the voices of workers because this was such an important part of the Emirates. These workers are everywhere but on the other side of the invisible and they don’t really have a voice. So the idea was for the artist group to engage with them to ask them to sing songs, and these tracks were collected in over fifteen different languages. We will produce a CD with all those collected songs and the idea behind the project is simply about the voice as a metaphor.

You may ask what this has to do with theme of ecology. When we discussed the theme, we knew it would be for us as curators a big challenge; to create a biennial on art ecology in a place like this, where the economy is based on fossil fuels. It was clear to us that it would be a naive approach to become something like a “green” biennial where everything is self-sustainable, and there have been already been shows about art and sustainability. It was important to question both in terms of ecology and the environment. An important theoretical starting point for me was also the book by Michael Shellenberger, *The Death of Environmentalism*, which is about the failings of the environmental movement and why we are in the situation we are in now and what could be done better. I discovered that there is no logical reason why things like global warming is an environmental issue, while war and poverty are not. I think the interconnectivity of all these different aspects were important for us when looking at the environment as a

thing that needs to be protected but really take a more trans-disciplinary and transversal approach to it.

#### **Mohamed Kazam**

*(Translated by Jack Persekian)* Mohamed is just saying: he's been an artist for many years and involved with the Emirate Fine Art Society for many years. He felt that there was a lot of a deficiency in the way that artists working in the Emirates are represented and that there is a need to find a way to work on their presentation as well as that of the whole artistic scene. That is why he started some workshops with some artists to engage in the more contemporary practices.

The workshops that he organized have greatly helped in discovering young talents which otherwise could not have been discovered and wouldn't have had the possibilities of a training with established artists. The goal is that these young artists in five years or more will be to participate in international art exhibition and Biennials.

#### **Jack Persekian**

In the last edition of the Biennial in 2005, I invited Mohamed to curate a parallel exhibition to the Biennial. He believes, and I know, that the invitation came for him to participate and be part of the curatorial team because his work deals with environmental issues. He looks at several aspects from the political and social even to the personal and Hamed was explaining how his work has so much to do with the local context and how he tries to reflect on the problems that the society faces here.

#### **Eva Scharrer**

Nikolaj Larsen has been involved with the biennial at so many levels, since the biennial was taken over by Hoor Al Qasimi in an attempt to engage more in the contemporary arts than was previously the case. Apart from participating as an artist in the Biennial six in Biennial seven Nikolaj did an artist-in-residency program for three months and he really had time to work with the place and to create specific work which culminated into an exhibition, and I think it will be great if you want to speak about it and maybe we can show some images at the same time.

#### **Nikolaj Larsen**

When in 2003 I was invited to exhibit as part of Biennial six, I'd never been to an Arabic country before and it was not too far after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. There was a lot of tension and it was just around the opening of the show that the second Gulf war broke out, so in artists' and everybody's minds, it was very strange to have an art exhibition in this region as the next door neighbour was in war. It was like a region in war and the work that I exhibited was very much dealing with that.

I had a month to install my work and because my installation was quite complicated, I collaborated with some local art students. That was one of the most interesting things for me, to collaborate with these people because I got like a first hand impression of what Arab people were like. I'm Danish and it was a culture quite far away from what I was used to. So I got very interested in Arabic culture but also in the power and challenge of the location. As Jack said, it's like an extended airport. Because I had a month, I started to see that it's also a place where people live and that it's not just a place where everything is in constant transit.

I wanted to explore this place more, and during the following Biennial, I applied for the artist-in-residence programme that ran parallel to the Biennial. As Eva said, I spent three months exploring the culture and quickly became interested in the workers who in many people's minds are the lowest common denominator but are also very important for the existence of this whole thing. Of course it takes a great deal of money to make this happen, but also takes a great deal of manpower.

Everywhere we travel and everything we see around us has been built by this workforce that is underpaid and makes this thing happen, so the work I made here tried to give a voice to this culture, to this part of society. I got funding to make a sixteen millimeter film and the starting point is the airport as I'm leaving Dubai. It sort of reflects back on different aspects of the place that I've seen and that I found interesting. I kept seeing things from the backside and from the inside. The more time I spent here, the more I could see either the cracks on the surface of the place.

I saw it from the desert and inwards, so I saw it from the workers' point of view, or trying to strip away all the glossiness that you normally see when you look at imagery or hear stories from this place.

#### Jack Persekian

I just want to open up this discussion to the floor, and I see many people here and I don't want this to be a monologue. So if people want to engage, ask questions, there is so much here that you have to tell us.

#### Nikolaj Larsen

What we're looking at now are two embroideries made in collaboration with some Indian embroiderers from Sharjah. They combine Indian embroidery with Arabic pattern structures and western slogans. One is 'change your life here', which is the reality for so many millions of people who live here. They come here expecting to change their life, expecting to earn a lot of cash, basically, and get a new beginning or a beginning. The other one says 'nobody any income', which is the graffiti I saw on a fence outside a building site, probably a graffiti made by a disillusioned person who came here. So it's a combination of the dream of coming here and the dream of all these things that one might expect here and the reality for lots of people here. *(Slide)* This one is a little tiny pencil drawing maybe twenty centimeters high in the gallery space where I showed my final show of the works that I created during the residency. This pencil drawing is called Hero. It's a drawing of a worker and it's sort of hidden away in the gallery. You wouldn't really notice it, and that's a little bit how I noticed that people don't notice the workforce.

#### Audience

I just want to say you're a professional artist, we assume sir. You've spent hours at university rendering really complicated drawings. I just would like to know what is so special about the drawing you're presenting.

#### Nikolaj Larsen

This particular drawing, what is special about it? Well, it's a fragile little simple pencil drawing, depicting a fragile little existence in this society.

#### Jack Persekian

Maybe we can save this bit of conversation if we have time. I don't know what time we have so please, shoot us with questions or suggestions.

#### Audience

I've noticed in general that there seems to be a disconnect between artists who are from the Middle East and who are very successful here, and they've been working here and they're well known here and the ones who are virtually from the Middle East and who are successful and prolific in the West. I was wondering how you deal with that in the Biennial. Do you find that you represent both sorts of people and do you find that an audience is not necessarily only attracted to the art stars from the West?

#### Jack Persekian

First of all, the curators started by looking at the practice of artists, what they've done before, and of course how they reflect on the theme. In our case we were going through many artists' portfolios trying to see who had already done work and who already had addressed some of the issues that we're presenting in the Biennial. Of course as Mohamed and Eva have said, it's not a green biennial about ecology in the very narrow sense, but the very wide spectrum from the micro to the macro, from the ecocatastrophes to the individual; yet at the same time, as I mentioned at the beginning, the Sharjah Biennial as a matter of policy tries to give a room for artists from the Arab World and gives them space and works. It supports them and produces their work. We also invite more well known artists who have already made it on the international scene and but also those who have just started, so we work with both and try to provide whatever we can, so that's a consideration. From the eighty artists we have selected, twenty-eight are from the Arab world.

#### Audience

And living in the Arab World?

#### Jack Persekian

Yes, and some of them are moving around, and some live in other places in the world. To me this doesn't matter. We try to get an

artist whose work is relevant to the discussion and that's why we've started well ahead of time. We started in mid-2006 bringing in artists to Sharjah and working with them here onsite as much as possible.

#### **Audience**

Who do you think your audience is or who would you like it to be?

#### **Jack Persekian**

I think for us the audiences, of course, means everybody because a biennial is for free and anyone can come and see. Even the opening day is an invitation to all, so there are no restrictions on that.

We try to advertise, of course, and try to bring in as many as possible, but in addition to that because we believe that the Biennial is part of the whole education process that was started in Sharjah a long time ago trying to raise awareness about art. Since 2005, we've collaborated with the Ministry of Education and we have a programme that lasts for two months where they bring in students from all ages to the Biennial, and last year we had more than seventy thousand students visit us. So the education programme is an integral and important element of the biennial, what makes it a biennial and not an art fair or...

#### **Eva Scharrer**

These are very pertinent questions about the nature of the audience and who was this for because it is a challenge to have a contemporary arts biennial. In any context this is a challenge and this touches on the issue we spoke about earlier today, referring to the nature of the public realm and what makes it up and the nature and the history of Middle East art in this context.

#### **Mohamed Kazem**

*(Translated by Jack Persekian)* Mohamed said that he believes, and I also subscribe to what he's saying, that there is a big gap between contemporary art and the public and what the public can understand and absorb but he says this is not the problem of the Biennial. The Biennial's duty is to present cutting edge contemporary art and provide the platform for that. He says that

there are other institutions in society that need to do that job, starting from the education system to the press to publishing houses and to all sorts of other players in society who need to come in and create the knowledge. In its essence it is trying to be avant-garde and put issues on the table that have not been presented before.

#### **Audience**

Yes, I appreciate you saying that you are taking under your wing all these new artists, but did you find it difficult that the well-established artists might be backing away from it because maybe they don't want to be in the same place where new artists will be showing?

#### **Eva Scharrer**

Well, whoever works in the arts business faces that. There are some artists we invite who always ask who else will be there.

#### **Audience**

That is my question.

#### **Eva Scharrer**

Yes. We get that, but I think the Sharjah Biennial has somehow established a reputation and a standard, so when we ask an artist to participate, he or she should engage it on that level rather than wanting to see who is on the roster. I think the Biennial would not want to entertain such an attitude.

#### **Audience**

Mr Nicolaj, my question is that now that you have come from Europe to an Arab country after 9/11, has your perception changed about the culture, as you must have had some perceptions through the news. Have you really tried to put your new perceptions about the Arab world in your work?

#### **Nikolaj Larsen**

I think the work I have made while I've been here has been mostly concerned with trying to deal with this new Arab World. In the work I made during a residency in Palestine, where I tried to explore and understand this image that you constantly are bombarded with in the West, of Muslim culture or Islamic society.



I traveled a lot around on the West Bank and tried to be very careful and very interested in trying to represent Palestinians in a way that we aren't used to seeing them in the media in the West. I found something different in my travels around the West Bank and that's currently being made into a film that I'm editing, and it will be shown in the museum later this year.

#### Audience

Jack, if it's not too early to ask you, I wonder whether you could speak a little bit to the way in which you are thinking about the installation of the work? Visibly the concept would be to talk about the relationship between similarities and differences visually. Are you trying to create a dialogue in which the issue about ecology and change and the role of art is common across cultures or are you interested in trying to do an installation in another manner? I mean, in relation to the selection of artists, the general overall concept obviously applies to everyone anywhere. Would it be possible to create a kind of seamless discourse about it? And yet we know that there are specificities, cultural specificities in the way in which governments are dealing with the issues of ecology and the way in which artists are dealing with it. I'm just interested in that.

#### Jack Persekian

Well, maybe I should start from the point that when Sheikha Hoor told me that we should consider ecology as our topic for the Biennial. I went back home to Jerusalem, Palestine and I was talking to some people about it, saying to them this is the most difficult task on my plate. People would tell me that we're in war and we are a troubled region; Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, etc. The list is endless. Why would we want to discuss ecology and the environment in such a context? They told me to go back and convince her otherwise... something along those lines.

As I was thinking about it, reading about it, discussing it with people in the arts, it seemed that at the very end we were creating a certain fabric, a fabric of so many different perspectives and so many different particular propositions. But there are few serious propositions about the environment and the habitus that we live

in, and that this is going to be a wonderful tapestry of so many different voices and images that a person coming to see the show will get. This time we had the advantage of having started at the beginning of 2006 to work on this, to bring people here to Sharjah, to the Emirates well ahead of time. We have a lot of projects that are "science" specific, not in the sense that I want to put this next to the door because it looks much better. We also had time specific projects like the one of recorded voices, coming from a very controversial point of view. When I asked the artist about the budget he asked, "How much money do you have," and I said, "I can afford this," and he said, "Okay we'll run this until I exhaust the budget". That was his point of view, and this is another way of looking at how money is used in such a place that is living off fossil fuel and is living off extracted natural resources.

Back in 2005 we had so much waste in the architecture. Why didn't we think of using reusable along the lines of the three Rs? We were using a scaffolding system this time and not the kind of steel structures that we used last time to build the Biennial, so I think we tried to go as far as we could and use as much as time as we had to spend on building cohesion, in the respect of diverse perspectives on the notions of the place we live in.

#### Audience

The artist said he was a guest in the UAE for three months. The Middle East is so diverse and we have beautiful mosques in terms of architecture, calligraphy and there are six or seven different types of calligraphy that I know of and which I am still learning about. And after these months, all you could come up with was a line drawing: a picture of an Indian guy. Why did you not explore more? Honestly, you could have done work on calligraphy or something?

#### Jack Persekian

This is something that we can discuss afterwards because this is about the Sharjah Biennial and not...

#### Audience

Yes, I understand so many issues like war, terrorism, Palestine. Maybe you should have gone to Palestine and taken pictures of

Palestinian kids dying. You could have presented them here, as we are a big audience. We came here to see work, not to hear a speech about how a biennial works.

**Jack Persekian**

Thank you – so many hands in the back...

**Audience**

I have a very simple, geographical, ethnic question because it seems that when you were talking about Sharjah Biennial the location was important for you. I only wanted to ask what your definition of Middle East is. What's the position of Iran, and is it a big black hole in the Middle East?

**Jack Persekian**

I've never said the Middle East. If you go back to everything that I said, I said the Arab world...

**Audience**

So we should consider the Sharjah Biennial as only about the Arab world?

**Jack Persekian**

No, it's an international biennial and there are artists from Iran who participated in the Biennial and from forty different countries in the world. What I was trying to say is that the Biennial gives special emphasis to artists from the Arab world, but nevertheless, it works with artists from all over the world and would produce work for almost all the artists who are participating. One of the curators in 2005 was Iranian, so it's not a black hole in the Middle East, believe me. It's part and parcel of the region.

**Audience**

I just have a quick question about the traces the Biennial leaves behind in the years between 2005 and 2007. Are there works that are left behind for a public that doesn't come for the Biennial itself but might come later? Are there publications or catalogues or essays?

**Jack Persekian**

We try to collect from the artists who exhibit. We try to buy a few works and keep them at the Sharjah Art Museum. Of course the whole idea of bringing Nikolaj here was also to talk about the artists-in-residence programme, which we've established in Sharjah and keep the channel open, rather than just going from one Biennial to another.

We are also considering now how to organize exhibitions that will happen in between Biennials, and of course that is not the job of the Biennial, but we want to see how important it is to maintain that contact and friction with the public.

**Audience**

I wonder if any of you could talk about the selection process of the artists for this edition. What I'm curious about is that there are so many international biennials and they've sort of become, or can become, sites where international nomadic artists descend on a city to make art. That art is funded and these events really become part of their budget to maintain their work as artists. Does responding to the context of a specific brief in a biennial limit the work of artists who choose to participate? Could you talk about the group of artists that are coming in this edition? Do they have a track record with environmental art? Have they been working with these issues for the past decade or are they simply responding to a brief?

**Jack Persekian**

I'm going to ask Eva to answer on this one as she is the curator.

**Eva Scharrer**

I think both cases are possible. I mean of course having a theme which is specific; we asked the artists to respond to the environment here in Sharjah, but it's also a very global problem that we are talking about. There are things that can be shown elsewhere and when we did the research, we did our homework and tried to find the artists who have been working on these issues. There are a couple.

We are doing a big installation by Metzger which was conceived in 1972 for the Global Climate Comprehensive in Stockholm, and it had never been realized though it was published that in the catalogue of the documenta of 1972, and we are now realizing it. I think this project is more relevant than ever before so it's an absolutely contemporary work, and there are other artists like the Peter Mann and Peter Fend who have been working on those issues for a long time. There is also a younger generation of artists whose work is deeply concerned with the environment. But we also invited artists who had maybe had not touched the environment theme as such but who were interested in doing so. I think we did a very open proposition and so the responses are very varied. I don't think that any artist has changed their work according to our theme.

**Maria Finders**

Thank you very much guys. We will all come and see you.

**Jack Persekian**

I hope so on the 4th of April.

.....  
3.30-4.00

**Jitish Kallat, Artist Mumbai, India and  
Anita Dube, Artist New Delhi, IN, with  
Savita Apte, Curator, Writer, Head of  
Education, DIFC Gulf Art Fair.**

**Maria Finders**

**We are going to move along like on a talk  
show. We have the next speakers coming  
up, thank you very much.**

**So the next panel will be a focus on  
India, and we have two fantastic artists  
from India: Jitish Kallat and Anita Dube.  
Savita Apte, who is the Education  
Manager of the Gulf Art Fair and a  
curator and critic from Mumbai, will be  
actually moderating this panel.**

**Savita Apte**

We are going to talk about art that's being produced in India now.

**Jitish Kallat**

Mumbai is a city of about eighteen million people, just two million short of looking as big as Australia, but we live on a patch of about fifty kilometers and the population density at the last count was about nineteen thousand eight hundred per square kilometers. So this really throws up a range of imagery and meaning and the theatre of life just gets amplified in all its glory in that sense.

My work feeds off that energy. It actually takes off from the sort of daily ritual of everyday life. *(Slide)* This was part of a larger project, looking at the city through an image where daily urban life explodes on the painting, which is about fifty different images and drawings that come together to form a single, large painting. The work is based on these brown supports, which are actually recreations of gargoyles from the top of the Victorian terminus building which stands in the centre of the city and which has been there for 120 years, watching the city explode from what it was to what it's constantly becoming.

Here is the gargoyle again as it spills waste, and I find it interesting that it vents the painting downwards from the sort of crazy mess, the range of imagery that emerges from the city street that forms part of these large paintings.

They are quite large; they are five meters long or six meters long so they have a sort of billboard scale in their conception. *(Slide)* This is a large panorama. It's almost like this wall, and it's called Artist making local call, and while I make that local call in the centre of the picture, in the panoramic format it allows for about two minutes of time to be encapsulated within a single still image. This method has obvious potential of having pictorial accidents. So what I actually do, as the camera pans, the cars, buses, rickshaws that are actually in motion start colliding. I did several of these.

The one that actually became the work had an old rickshaw and a taxi, which were in the same place at the same time, creating a sort of imaginary collision or a pictorial collision and the people on all sides of that collision are the same people because they are sort of marched across in the moment that's passed in that fragment of time.

This is a companion of photographic work. The city speaks through layers of collision, people can't walk apart from each other just because they clamor for space and this is a 68 part photographic chronicle of dented automobiles in the city. It's called Automobile the Skypark. It appears like abstract paintings as it has come into the space, and slowly you start reading in these

sorts of rather seductive color swatches, small wounds and scars. I was interested in a certain kind of personification of these inanimate objects as carriers of certain phrases of meaning.

This is an installation view of a recent show and I bring this image in because one of the pieces in the show connects to the image I have currently in one of the galleries at the fair. It's a piece called Suffolk's Herbaceous Perennial, and it's been part of my effort to find ways to register this image of the city and these kind of floral images, which become visually seductive and then slowly transform into faces. In that bizarre transformation, you realize that it is an image of public transport, violence, genocide, decapitated heads and it sort of starts tipping away from where it kind of began. They are mounted on these inverted chicken legs which give it another dimension of sinister bittersweet quality. Next one: Images like Suffolk's Herbaceous Perennial emerged out of earlier work like this one. *(Slide)* These are large paintings, and they are almost like a billboard format. It's acting in some way as the model of a Bollywood film poster but then replacing some of the star cast with people from the street. And this group was essentially unemployed, unskilled people who gather outside railways stations every day in search of daily wage. In an evolving scenario where the city itself and the country itself was fraught with a lot of fundamentalist issues, this mob becomes the mobilizing force in what becomes a democracy during riots and becomes very interesting and fuelled by people. They are actually technically harmless. That's been a group that has been emerging in my pieces for the last few years.

### Savita Apte

Whereas your work is suburbia into urbanity, the city, the country and the world, Anita's work really focuses much more on the body and the person and in far smaller microcosms, so Anita...

### Anita Dube

This is a work called Tragedy, taste, swallow and speak and has an image of a woman protesting at the time of the riots, which were actually the worst form of fundamentalist and anti-colonist sort of violence we have ever had in the city, and this woman almost

becomes an embodiment of dissidence. *(Slide)* This is a large text-based work on a mirror called Public notice, and the text in this work is a speech that Nehru rendered on the midnight of independence and carries loads of themes about hope and prosperity for India and Pakistan and the greater secularism in the country and follows how in the last 50 years the nation has conducted itself. What I do is take the text; I hand rendered it using rubber adhesive, but I also burn it and cremate the text. The act of burning actually registers it onto the surface but also warps the mirror and the viewer actually sees themselves, you know, distorted within that surface in narrow speech. *(Slide)* I was also interested in the fact that fire remains an important element in most religious practice, but also, since most violence in India actually erupts out of religion, it's also part of the rioting politics, not just the right wing politics that India seems to be fighting.

*Next:* This was a central piece at my solo show in Chicago a few years ago called The Dudgeon. It's a speech that Swami Vivekananda gave on 9/11 1893 in Chicago at the first world parliament of religious leaders meeting. The speech was about co-existing with East and West to create a greater understanding between the occident and the orient. And strangely it has been 108 years since that we had 9/11 and 108 remains a full circle in Hinduism, wherein it's the number of beads on the rosary for chanting and meditation etc. So from that hell, within this chance, coincidence was a range of other ways in which one could read the text that warps the viewer who tries read this narrative.

This is a recent work called Death of Distance. It's a one rupee coin the height of an average Indian and it's treated in black lead. Black lead is a material that I've been working with quite often. It's the softest form of carbon and diamond remains the hardest. I immediately get an access to privilege through the rendition of the material. The coin has behind it five frames which are identical prints. It's about a disturbing tale of a young girl,

who committed suicide because her family could not give her a rupee for a meal, which spread all over the internet. Simultaneously dispersed by Indian government was this narrative of a one rupee coin that can connect the south of India to the north and it was called "The death of distance in India", signifying incredible India, India shining, all that we hear about the "elephant" economy. Standing in front of the frame there is no way you could read the story of India's press release without reading the narrative of the girl, so they constantly ghost into each other as you walk in the gallery. As you walk in, you see the seven faces of the moon, almost an image of hope. It's only when you come closely that they become a shrinking meal, sort of hope and deprivation morphing into one single image. It's called "Conditions of life". Thank you.

There isn't that much time so I'm going to show about twenty images of works done recently, but I will just show recent work and then try to speak about it. What I immediately want to say is that the work deals with a lot of contradictions as you can right away see. It's about concepts and it's about the body. These are words cut out of meat that I did live in an alternative space that I work with in Delhi. The performance was in front of a live audience, cutting out some words out of slabs of meat and actually discussing with the audience what these words meant to individual members in the audience, and I was trying to write down whatever feedback I was getting from the audience on a blank canvas as an infrastructure of meanings through which we could understand how lived experience could then be recorded about certain concepts and words; so, it's a series of photographs that I did and I'm just showing you some of them.

**Savita Apte**

Anita, you said that you purposely de-privilege the visual in your work.

**Anita Dube**

Sorry?



### Savita Apte

You said you de-privilege the visual in your work.

### Anita Dube

Not purposely. One of the things that I like to do is to take away the overload of the visual in the visual arts. I believe there is an overload of the visual and there is an overload of the spectacle. So my work tends to kind of be very intimate and very labour intensive. For example, this work is called *Phantoms of Liberty* and it's a suite of works in which, again, there is a contradiction involved in the sense that things are associated with war and the outside are brought into the interior of the home, a bed and details inside the bed that you can see. The domestic interiors have been covered with camouflage material, and through the suite of works, I wanted to point out the problem of the whole militarist mode as not only something that happens outside of us but has now invaded homes because of all the video games that the children are playing, etc. So it was trying to bring all these issues right into the domestic interior and trying to confront them in a very physical and real way as something that is not too far.

If you notice that my processes are a lot about getting found material into the studio and then very intimately dealing with it by covering it with different kind of fabric surfaces that I have used over a period of time. This particular thing is all kind of things taken from physics and chemistry laboratories, so it's about a lot of surplus values and chemical waste along with body parts from mannequins and from shop windows. This is a couple with clothes and various other details, but as you can see, everything cancels itself out visually when the inside and the outside of objects of the same material. . . it's so chaotic that things tend to cancel themselves out, and the whole work was about a kind of a very nihilistic and very cancelling kind of situation that we were facing.

I wouldn't say that my work is political in the traditional sense. Certain situations attract me to certain found objects and certain things at a particular moment in time. *(Slide)* Again a whole suite

of works, this is the oven that's a kind of safe in which a lot of people keep money in India and that's a detail from that work. There is a lot of work that I did previous to this work. I took a lot of foam packing material and industrial things in which things are packed, which I found in a dump, detritus from the industrial world we live in, but they reminded me of third-world architecture which was small house, not very spectacular buildings and I covered them with bandages. And I made an installation in which they are suspended on sheets of glass, while below are lights from cars and ambulances and the work has a time factor involved in it.

*(Slide)* A certain moment of time, the ambulance and the police lights are cut off and then the whole work becomes a very quiet kind of a moment, and after a while, a certain degree of time – about five minutes – then the car and the ambulance lights start to rotate and it's cut off. So again, it's pretty chaotic and a moment in which I was trying to address moments of destruction.

*(Slide)* Again, more works connected with style of home packing materials, bandaged and found material, like this slogan that I found in the newspaper. So they are not things that I create. I pick up things from the streets, from the newspaper from cuttings and things like that and all the work evolves out of this found material. *Next:* Again another building which I covered with bandage and placed on light boxes. *(Slide)* The base of this wall is industrial style of foam packing waste for different machine parts specially connected to the television industry. I found them one day as I was driving on a highway. I saw it at the back of a truck and I was immediately struck by the structure of it, which reminded me of an architectural feature in Islamic architecture that I love very much, and I was very struck by the fact that this industrial packing waste material, which was possibly designed by some designer, maybe in the heart of America or maybe somewhere there has no idea about this culture. So I assembled them in this kind of a wall-type format and I embedded certain images of not necessarily violent images from the war, but certain images of the human condition including medical imagery. And I thought that I would like to make a kind of contemporary stained glass wall at this

point of time, again another contradiction. Which was interesting maybe for everybody here because I am not Muslim. I'm Hindu. I live in India.

**Savita Apte**

I was just going to say that it was just a real snapshot of what we are doing in India and what's coming out of India. Practitioners are using a plurality of materials and also a plurality of themes. They're expressing their interest and their intentions in different ways. Jitish's work and Anita's work involve the body and the body politics, which in a country with our population, it's difficult not to do so.

**Anita Dube**

Can we run through the slides as you are talking?

**Savita Apte**

But if you wanted to say a couple of words at the end.

**Anita Dube**

These are a lot of ceramic eyes that I used for religious purposes back in India, but I have taken them out of that religious context and put them in a secular context. In this case I was dealing with a kind of architecture, which is such a neutral thing. I wanted to sexualize architecture in that way and also to point out the kind of trap that happens when three planes meet in a corner and there is a situation where there is a sense of being trapped. These are the other kinds of drawings I have done with the eyes. I'm sorry to be racing away like this; it's almost as if we are fighting against time here. This is another series of photographs that I have done in which I have installed these eyes on my own body and taken some photographs, and I think this is the last slide that I have to show you.

**Maria Finders**

Your work is not in the fair. Where can they see you?

**Anita Dube**

I could leave some catalogues with you; I am carrying some so I will leave them with you.

**Maria Finders**

Very good. It's important, after the conversations we have here, that you meet the people outside as well, which is a very important part of this. It's kind of an introduction to work and then we that the relationships will go from there. Thank you very much. Thanks a lot.

.....  
4.00-4.30

**Daniel Birnbaum, Rector of the Stadelsschule  
Art Academy and Director of the Portikus  
Gallery, Frankfurt am Main, DE.  
Solmaz Shabazi, Artist, Tehran, Iran,  
and Berlin, DE.**  
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**Maria Finders**

So moving right along, we have a tiny  
change of programme because Haluk  
was sick. He had the flu, so we have  
Daniel Birnbaum coming from  
Frankfurt. He will be discussing the  
work of Solmaz, which will also be a very  
interesting thing. We were hoping we  
could have two artists together ; now we  
have an artist and an important curator,  
so I think it will go very well. Solmaz and  
Daniel, come forward.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Thanks Maria. I was asked to take over the role to be the  
discussion partner with Solmaz. First, I was a little bit confused  
because I thought I know her art and I know her, but then I  
realised, and I think that most of you will probably know this, but  
there are several Solmazes in the art world right now. But, what I  
didn't know was that they are all three sisters, which is an  
interesting thing that we can come to.

Solmaz is an artist who lives and works in Germany, in Berlin.  
She's from Tehran but she has been in Germany since 1985,  
I think. She has a background technically, so to say from an  
educational point of view, not directly in exhibition art but in  
architecture. She studied in Stuttgart, where there is a famous  
academy that also includes architecture, and she has been very  
visible in the last couple of years across Europe and in the US. She  
was in the Istanbul Biennial and we will have a chance to see a few  
things from three works. I will ask just a few questions. Solmaz  
works with photography but most prominently with video, I  
think. So we can also talk a little bit about medium, the choice  
of medium, etc. Maybe you want to say a few introductory words.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Well, maybe I will introduce why I've chosen the medium of  
video. By the time I decided to do something in the arts, the  
decision came because I seemed to be a kind of representative of  
Iran, and I had to ask to answer so many different questions. You  
know, those questions when you live abroad and people come  
and are so interested because you come from such a political  
country. You have to answer so many questions. I always refused  
to answer until I finished my architectural study and decided to  
make just one statement: to use moving images and sound, which  
was a mistake. It was very difficult to do. That's actually why I  
chose the medium of video. I wasn't intending to go to the art  
context but it happened to me. After having done that, I wanted  
to make a documentary and to show it on TV once and answer  
those kind of questions, but TV wasn't interested in my work and  
the art world was, which made it much more easier for me than to  
work.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So you became an artist because of the interest that was shown in  
what you were already doing anyhow. I mean, people from the art  
world paid attention to things you did, but you thought they were  
actually meant for another format, for another context.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Well, yes. I meant to do this, just this one thing. Then I happened to be at the ARCO in Madrid five years ago or something, and then there was this big interest into my work but not into my country and my heritage, which was great. I started using that as a tool to go on working there.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Should we take a more concrete take a look at the first of your works? You have stills, right? You don't have moving imagery here?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

No, this is actually one still image of the first film I was talking about. It's called Tehran 1380. The whole concept was about when somebody who has lived in Iran, and who has also lived in Germany, tries to use the kind of imagery and information that people are so used to seeing, but to flip it into a style that I use having studied architecture in Germany. It was pretty obvious that there was going to be another point of view looking at Tehran not just being the place that people see on TV and the political situation and mullahs and the women wearing scarves and whatever.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

A very naive or direct question: why is it called Tehran 1380?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

It's the year that we made it in. It's the Iranian calendar; it was 2001 – that is 1380. Can you just go to the next one?

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Is it a documentary or is it pretending to be a documentary?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

It's trying to be, pretending to. I'm always using a documentary format, but in my way, which is not just about informing people and taking them by the hand and telling them what's true, but by talking about my intentions. It's very easy to get the people through this format because it's like a TV format.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

One knows the format and one knows what to expect. One can read the codes but can also be fooled into the way of looking – that it's not the only way of looking at things. I'm just trying to understand why you work with that.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Well, we're used to watching TV, and we are used to just sitting in front the TV to get information. It just comes into us.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

For those of you and most of us who have not seen the work or have not seen the work recently, what does the documentary concentrate on? Is it a kind of architectural outlook? No, it concentrates on buildings.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

It concentrates on social changes and urban changes in Tehran since 1978 until today and what we've been doing. I have to mention that I have made this documentary. We have been doing this and looking at these changes through comparing two residential complexes in Tehran. One has been planned and built before the revolution and one has been planned before the revolution was finished, and by looking at these and comparing these two complexes, we're also actually talking about changes in societies. This is something else.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Maybe we should stop a little bit. Although you work in Germany, and actually since you were a young person most of your life, or most of your intellectually mature life has been in Germany, you concentrate on the origins of your family. Is that not true? It's just this one piece?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

No, there are three videos that I made about Tehran and then absolutely doing anything about Tehran.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

But you said it was a relief when people did not want to talk about the place where you're from and that you looked at the art, the

art work in its own right. But the first piece was still about the place where you're from.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

The first well-known piece.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes, it was about Tehran. Well, I used this situation of my origin, but I'm not into working with my identity as being Iranian or whatever, but being an Iranian woman made it possible for me to be here today and using this title of an Iranian woman made it possible for me to come into the art world.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

This question may seem silly seeing as I am an art director of an academy in Germany, but I wonder a little bit how – new questions of identity maybe – but I wonder how Germany worked out. You were educated in Germany. This kind of art seems very formal. This base is a strong tendency in German art in the last decade. There is this kind of look of things that one can see; maybe your work is more German than you would normally think.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Maybe it is; maybe you're right, and it's not Iranian.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

I don't mean that critically I'm just thinking.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes, it is very natural.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

The whole German photography tradition from the last 25 years seems somehow present in your way of working.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Which is natural because I studied there and I am living there. It's not Iranian, and I really did avoid falling into this trap of the style

of art that is happening here in this region and also in Iran because that would be wrong because, as you said, I am not educated like that.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Before we go on to the next piece, you say the piece is about social transformation, social changes. It focuses on architecture, but it's about bigger shifts, I guess. Can you say a few things about what it is? If one understand these according to the same parameters as you intended or the both of you intended, what is it that one learns from the piece? It's a silly question, but does it have an educational kind of agenda?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I hope not. It was not my intention to teach.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Do you know things afterwards that you didn't know before? Is that it?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

You know that you had a preconception, pre-imagery about Iran. That is what I try to do. This is not Tehran. We are not talking about facts. We are just saying this could also be Tehran, so at the end of the day it's about how imagery works in your mind and how somebody like me who uses the video format can also take influence from it.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So the piece is shot in many places?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Is that a secret or could I ask you the question: where is it shot?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

What do you mean, "in many places"? It's shot in Tehran

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Yes, but you say it's not Tehran, so it's just a lot of places in



Tehran. There are no ingredients that are kind of not...

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I'm not just talking about this. It's just my way of looking at Tehran. It's just another way, and what we also try to do, for example, we try to avoid all kinds of images that you might know, like the mosques and the bazaar and the ornamental kind of architecture that doesn't actually really exist.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

The feel is more generic.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Maybe we could get back to the piece and compare to the other. Continue. What is the next thing that you have?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

This piece that I brought was shown at the Istanbul Biennial in 2005. I was commissioned to do a work on Istanbul, which was the title of the Biennial. It was actually very difficult to do after having somehow become a specialist on Tehran. It was very difficult to go to somewhere and do the same thing because I know Tehran so well, and I really wanted to avoid becoming, getting into this tourist point of view and making those mistakes that I'm criticising about people who do work on places that they don't know. So what I picked was a phenomenon that is actually appearing everywhere in the world, but also in Turkey, which is the gated community. In this one I just shifted. I changed my place and gave my scene to three professionals. We are talking about this phenomenon and why it is happening in Turkey, that it has become so fashionable to live in gated communities, and the point of my own situation. I asked them to speak in English so that you can tell that it is me as an outsider who wants to get close to something that is happening there. And the piece was a video installation with a projection. You don't see anyone, you only see images from this complex and you hear – you can listen via headphones – to the discussion between these three

professionals. Then there is a TV screen and on that TV screen I have interviewed a lady who was living in one of the gated communities. That's, for example, another project.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

How was this produced? You spent a lot of time there then, did you?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

It was a very short while. I had over eight months in Tehran and I had two months in Istanbul, which was short to just get well prepared and produce.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So human beings are not present in the imagery at all?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Sometimes you can see people passing through the image. I have been collecting. What I do is collect images separately from my interviews so I'm not documenting what I'm saying by showing the images like a documentary.

This is a huge complex where people seem to be very happy and I couldn't believe it. That's why I went there.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So you see this as a very political work. Is it a critical piece about these developments or is it just out of curiosity how human beings produce their social environments? Or, what is it that you want? Maybe that's an old fashioned question, but what is it you want to say with this piece?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

It's about new phenomena in society and changes, and why we tend to go to like a place like this, why people have started to come to this idea that a gated community is cool to live in.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So again there is this kind of generic level. It is about Istanbul, but it could have maybe been produced in Los Angeles or in other places that have gated communities, right? And are you interested in the fact that these generic situations, these places

look similar or maybe not similar? This is more of a question to you in different parts of the world the way that your piece in Tehran is hiding the most visible of what we as outsiders would immediately recognise as Tehran. Are you also neutralizing things so that it could have been about, say, Los Angeles?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So it's about social environments, the way human people construct their social spheres.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

And it can be anywhere. Also the changes we were talking about in Tehran could have been happening anywhere else, so I use the context of the city as an example of something that is happening everywhere.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Is it about the disappearance of the public realm? Now I sound like a German art professor, but what I was hinting at before, and this is my fantasy, say someone like Thomas Struth is actually documenting and taking these photographs – a different language, a different take – documenting both what is specific and generic sometimes. It doesn't matter if it's Düsseldorf or some place in the US or in Holland or something. But when an art writer writes about his work, it's considered as very cold and distant – just documenting things. But on the other hand, it's a reflection on the disappearance of the city as a common public realm. It seems that the documentation of gated communities is really about a disappearance of something we know as public life or something that we can share, or any citizen can share in or being a member of it. The moment you live in a city you are part of it, but in a gated community you are not. You either buy into it or you don't, and where am I going with this: is there a level of warning in not saying too much or a criticism of this disappearance or is it very feminine logic? Very dry, the eye of documentation; you leave it on the neutral level.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I leave it on a neutral level.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So is it up to the viewer to make it up?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

That is something that is very important for me, not to point out things, as I was saying before, and not taking the viewer by the hand and telling them, "this is my work, look at it, and this is the truth". What I do is just part of what's out there, and you can always combine your ideas into what I do. It's not about finished statements.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So there's maybe a more political level in your work but it's never moralising. Would you agree with that?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I hope it's not; I try not to.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Shall we go onto the next work?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

If you want to. This is a group of images that I've been showing at the Istanbul Biennial as well. I was showing them as light boxes, referring to my origins coming from a video and not being a photographer. *(Slide)* And what I did here was – I was again talking about having preconceptions and expectations of images that you see. These are called 'untitled light boxes', and that's the whole concept. I'm only saying that these images have been taken in the Middle East during four years, but I'm not saying where and I always have this funny situation that I really do after three images or something. I can catch people asking me, "where is it?" And then I can say it's not about where it is, it's about the image. So I'm trying to...

**Daniel Birnbaum**

How many are there? Is it an ongoing series or...

**Solmaz Shabazi**

There are just eight but I have a whole...

**Daniel Birnbaum**

There is much more.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Yes. Many, many more.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

How do you show them?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

As light boxes in different combinations as well. I had two next to each other, and I showed four of them in London at a gallery, for example. So it always depends upon the situation that I can choose the combination of the photographs. That's it.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So is the series closed now or is it still ongoing? Are you still producing these?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I am still producing.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

So this can go on for quite a while?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I think so. There are so many cities that I can take photos in, but the Istanbul Biennial was the only place to have shown it until now.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

You have mainly been showing, maybe this is more sociological question, but you've mainly been showing in big groups shows in the biennial situation or is that wrong? That's what I learned about just looking at your CV.

**Solmaz Shabazi**

Well, I've shown in two biennials, not too many. One was in Sharjah two years ago, and the other one was Istanbul. The rest are big room shows mostly dealing with, as you know, dealing with all kind of subjects.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Taking this a step further; do you prefer to show in a more commercial traditional gallery context, or does your work need the kind of social backdrop that often big international group shows or biennials provide? Or could you also just as well show it in a gallery somewhere in Germany?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I hope it is going to be possible at one point, but it hasn't happened yet. But it's not my purpose that I'm only showing in big shows.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Why do you think that video installation has become almost a natural starting point for an artist today? I may be exaggerating, but to simplify, I work for an art school and I have the sense that young students now, instead of doing sketches, make small films and then one can see what to do with it.

So this provokes the question; will you continue doing mainly film, moving imagery based work or what do you think, where is this going?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

I'm in this stage of deciding, and I don't know. Well, I've stopped producing for a year now because I am really in that process, and am I going to continue making videos about cities and social changes for my life, or am I going to make other things, maybe do sketches and painting and become a real artist/artist and not just the architect who has become a video artist.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

I realise that we are approaching the end already. I'm happy that we've had the chance to get to know your work, but you will show in the Sharjah Biennial? Is there any place will you not show?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

No. I was at the last one.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Sorry that was my misunderstanding... can one see your work here?

**Solmaz Shabazi**

There is one on video show. It's one of the three films that I made on Tehran; you can see it there.

**Maria Finders**

Thank you very much. The Bidoun lounge is actually on Fort Island. That means if you are in the central part of the show and you cross the little bridge, you will come to the Bidoun lounge, and that's where you can see the videos of Solmaz. There are a whole bunch of other pieces of art there, and it's very impressive to see that.

.....  
4.30-5.00

**Kamran Diba, Founder, Tehran Museum,  
Architect, Collector, Art Adviser, FR & ES.  
Ebrahim Melamed, Collector, Honart  
Museum, Tehran, Iran.**  
.....

**Maria Finders**

Now we have the great privilege of having two wonderful people coming to us from Iran, but not really from Iran. They're coming from all over the world, so it's almost difficult to say, but they are from Iran: Kamran Diba, who is an architect and a collector, and Ebrahim Melamed who is a businessman and collector. I would like to invite you up.

It was a very interesting conversation we were having a few hours ago about all this because I didn't realize that Mr Diba was also a very big collector. We started really speaking about how collecting is part of the influencing role of starting anything in any country with very informed collectors, people who really live with art. That's kind of where the story always

starts and this is a little bit about the relationship between having an important sales event, which is a trade show sometimes, because collectors can become familiar with the art and actually buy it and live with it, so this is really interesting to know that. I met Ebrahim last year in Basel when we had a big conversation about the Middle East, and we started talking about how his life changed from discovering art. I think the first experience was with Anish Kapoor, which is not negligible when we meet Anish Kapoor. You were living in Switzerland at the time, and Sylvia Fleury was also a very big influence on your work as a collector. Also coming from that, you started to collect younger artists like Olafur Eliasson and thought of going back to Iran to actually work with that. I've never met Mr Diba before, but I've always wanted him as a speaker so now I finally get him. And I was reading your biographical note, which comes really from an architectural point of view. As we all know, you have built the contemporary art museum in Tehran, which is one of the famous works, but you also won the Aga Khan prize for your work as an architect. It was really interesting to discover that you're also a collector and someone who's moved the scene in Iran forward, and I'm sure in other countries, with your contributions. I think we are going to start looking a little bit at the work of Mr Diba, also considering his collection, which he is going to commentate for us, and then his backdrop will initiate our discussion with Ebrahim, who's almost in a way continuing in this tradition that was started in Iran for contemporary art.

#### **Kamran Diba**

Well, I will start with the idea of the museum. This museum goes back half a century almost, and so I was a crazy young guy who had this vision of creating a museum of contemporary art in the late 60s. I'm going to show you only four images of this museum and some of the collection. I'm not going to show you my own personal collection, but I'll show you some highlights of the collection of the museum that I not only built but also conceived and inaugurated. I was kind of a one-man band. I did it all and I enjoyed it while doing it.

So we started designing the museum in '69, and it took me ten

years to do it. It was eventually funded by the government, but it was managed by a private foundation which belonged to the Queen at the time. She gave me the authority to do whatever I wanted to do. So I designed it, and then according to one of my friends, a collector, I had to live with my sin. In other words, I had to fight with the building to make it work and install all the pieces that I was privileged to buy.

*(Slide)* This shows the range of the collections. Some of the sculptures we have go back from the early 20th century. Actually we started with a few Impressionists, and I built up the collection up to the avant-garde of, let's say, around '78, which means minimal art and conceptual art of the time. *(Slide)* This shows a little interior shot. I don't have many shots because I haven't been to Tehran for 30 years to photograph the building, but I managed to get a few for you to give you a flavour. *(Slide)* This is the collection. Well, of course you want to know a little bit about how we went about building this collection.

At the time we had an oil crisis and the price of oil sky-rocketed, and there was a recession in the West. We were very lucky because there was a lot of art available. Good quality blue chip art, as they say. And we happened to purchase a big collection in a very short time. My original idea was to build an Abstract Expressionist collection, and at the time, I dare to say we had the biggest collection of New York school outside of the United States.

But unfortunately, the museum did not continue after I left and after the regime changed. It went into coma for quite a few years. At the time, I started a movement of neighbourhood cultural centres in Iran in the '60s, so this *(Slide)* is one of the culture centres, which in the centre was an old building. This had started to be destroyed, but I renovated it and I put a library and a hall and we made a small neighbourhood culture centre. The idea was to have discussions. It was in a city park in a neighbourhood so that people could go there as they go to a park with places for the children to play, and we even had a library for children and an art workshop for the children of the neighbourhood.



(Slide) This in the later period. I made a little more sophisticated, small neighbourhood – also culture centre in a park – and always felt it should be in an urban situation but within a green space. So I had to become a landscape architect as well because I couldn't find one at the time in Iran. I decided that, well, I'm a landscape architect, so also a promoter for the idea because there was no such a project as culture centres. Everybody laughed at me and I said, "this is going to work and it's fantastic, so just bear with me".

(Slide) This is the courtyard and you are going out to the park, and I will show you some green stuff. This was the existing old garden with magnificent trees and we embellished it and made it into a public area. How am I doing on time? I'm rushing. It's the young man's time.

**Maria Finders**

You are doing fine.

**Kamran Diba**

So I like to also touch upon the changes which have occurred in the art world. In those days I was also very much criticised for having this one-man show and making the museum. Funnily enough, we inaugurated the museum the same year that Centre Pompidou was inaugurated in Paris. They dared to make a new museum and move out of the old quarters, so we were also pioneers in a way. On our board we had Tom Messer of the Guggenheim, and so we were very international. Nelson Rockefeller visited us at the opening – a bit of a name dropping – but we had a lot of fanfare and international exposure, and a lot of people criticised me because I paid a hundred thousand dollars for a Roy Lichtenstein painting, which I hope to show you among the collection of the museum. The funny thing is that Clement Greenberg, who I believe some of you have heard of, was a very reactionary art critic, but he really criticised me and the museum. He thought it was absurd and silly to put all this contemporary meaningless art on the walls and buy it for Iran. I called him a New York cultural colonialist I thought if it's good enough to have our objects in your museums, then it's good enough for us to have your 20th century objects in our museums. Why not?

Another funny thing that caught on. . . the museum is one of the only institutions which survived the regime change, and I was so thoughtful that I didn't call it after the Queen or the daughter of the King but instead called it the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. So in fact, it was the only institution that did not go through a name change. I'm very proud of what I did in that museum. The avant-garde spirit of the collection and the very idea of the museum are very foreign to Iran and they use the museum as an exhibition hall. The collection is hardly shown and they make very occasional exhibits, in which they show part of the collection. And so this gives you an idea of the range of the collection, which we start with from the Impressionists and gradually we have the Cubists and the Picasso and Leger, which by the way, someone wanted to pay one hundred and fifty million dollars for it, to buy it from the museum and they didn't sell. In my student days I used to go to the Phillips Gallery and sit in a room with three Rothko's and contemplate and concentrate on the vibrating colours. We also have a collection of 20th century photography, 20th century works on paper, 20th century architecture and 20th century painting and sculpture.

**Ebrahim Melamed**

Mr Diba, who chose this collection? Did you choose it personally?

**Kamran Diba**

I was personally involved with the majority of the acquisitions, but some of the work was offered directly from the Queen's office, like some of the Impressionists, which, I wanted very much to concentrate on, to have few modern pieces. I was well aware that it's not possible to build a complete 20th century collection, so I wanted to concentrate let's say on the contemporary art, Post-War and specially New York school which a lot of Europeans are snobs about, and they didn't realize that it is the school of that time. And so most of the collection, post-1950 collection, is directly my work but for some of the earlier works, I was consulted and some of them were offered directly to the Queen's office. She purchased it and made it a gift to the museum.

### Ebrahim Melamed

Were there private collectors contributing work?

### Kamran Diba

No, we had none. Private collections were very rare in those days and, of course we also, in parallel, were collecting contemporary Iranian art. My idea was also to build a collection of Iranian artists, which is still in the museum and is almost the only relevant collection from that period. But this was very odd and new to the situation. But I am proud to say that this has worked as a backbone, as a tradition and the museum was perhaps monumental and perhaps irrelevant to the situation, but I thought that this would put the art into the centre of the culture. In the old days they used to make banks, which are very solid stone buildings and that's why people trust them and they put their money in them. Nobody wants to put money in a flimsy bank that you could blow away with a little bomb. So it's the same idea. We wanted to have a very substantial monument to the Iranian artists and art and I'm glad to say that I succeeded.

### Maria Finders

So in this tradition, Ebrahim kind of takes the flame as a very young collector because I think you are even under forty...

### Ebrahim Melamed

Well, you know, I was seventeen then, and I was a student. Before starting, I want to say that it's an honor to be on this stand with Mr Diba because he's been my role model really and he's being very humble. But he's so much more than that museum. He is the one who has supported the works of the major Iranian artists of the time. He supported them; he helped them out: you know we owe it to him. He created not only the museum but also the whole tradition of the exchange between artists from the West to Iran and vice versa, and I would like to continue this tradition. So going back to your question, at a time when I was a student, I was in Switzerland and you know art was something that interested me...

### Maria Finders

I think your dad was a collector.

### Ebrahim Melamed

Yes, he was a collector but not contemporary, more old masters. When I was very young, I used to go to the flea markets with him and I got the passion from him. I would say it's a passion. When he saw a work that he liked and the glaze in his eyes... the passion was really something that was extremely important to me and I think he passed it on to me now.

### Maria Finders

And so this discovery period comes from Switzerland and has allowed you to learn a lot about contemporary art in the West. So when you went back to Iran, what was the first thing you did?

### Ebrahim Melamed

Well, I went back to Iran to work, so I set up my company and the family business and after two years of living there, I saw the point of not being able to travel freely or going to exhibitions. I needed a kick and I didn't get it. I had to travel very far to see good art works, and the fact was that in Iran, there were great art works but they were so hidden and they weren't out there. So the idea came up and I said why not have my collection and have a space to show the collection? So at the beginning, it was a very small project and little by little it grew and it grew.

### Maria Finders

I would really like to see this project because we talked about it a year ago, the last time we met in Basel. So can we show a little bit of this collection?

### Ebrahim Melamed

This is a logo and the idea of the name means art, and when you fuse it with art it's also becomes Honart, so that is where the name comes from. When you say Honart, it doesn't mean anything but the fact that when you read it, then you can understand it, so it's very though provoking, and I like that. *(Slide)* So this is just a bit of background history: the construction started in 2003. The building is extremely modest. I didn't want it to be a landmark in the city, and I didn't want to compete with the already existing museum, and also because of the budget, I couldn't allow myself to just go crazy. So, it's a very simple building, but it's very large –

around 5,000 square meters and the land is 10,000 square meters. In the storage facilities, everything has been thought of. It's a state-of-the-art storage and temperature controlled, you name it... it really competes with the major institutions around the world. It's also 100% earthquake safe because we have the problems of earthquakes in Tehran, so early on I thought that safety was also very important.

I'm also making a book shop. A book shop is something that we really need and that we don't have right now, so that's very important. Also there will be an amphitheatre and a conference hall, a coffee shop on the terrace overlooking the city where people can hang around, and it will be a place for the exchange of ideas and conversations between artists and the public. Next door to the museum there will be a building for residencies so artists from abroad will be invited to stay there for a couple of months to realise their projects, and whether it's a specific one or whether they are just there to research, so that has been thought of as well. These are some images of the construction and it will soon be finished. We are opening in a year 's time. I don't know if this gives you an idea ; it's still quite raw...

#### **Maria Finders**

Is there an architect who works with you?

#### **Ebrahim Melamed**

Yes, a good Iranian architect and as I said the construction is extremely simple, but the storage facilities and all the viewing spaces are very important. It's sort of a very white cube with ceilings of ten meters high to show art works. I didn't want it to be a landmark I emphasize that.

#### **Maria Finders**

So it's like a factory in a way?

#### **Ebrahim Melamed**

Sort of. It's in the industrial zone in Tehran, and it's towards the western part of the city, close to the airport. It is very easily accessible even by public transport, as there is a metro and there are buses in the area. I'm sure it's going to become a booming

area for artists to move into, galleries to open up and all sorts of other art related facilities.

The first show is going to be a permanent collection of the works, which have been collected for the past few years and we have a full program until the spring of 2009. So the idea of the collection is bringing art from the West to Iran and from East to the West as I said before. The collection focuses on the individual artists, those artists in great depth to allow the viewer to understand the essence of the work. We are going to look at some slides of the existing collection and in the background and we can talk about... I don't have to describe the works.

#### **Maria Finders**

But what made you decide to collect artists in depth? Usually it's a lot more superficial, you know. If you are doing a museum, usually it's a couple of pieces that are important but not this in depth kind of line.

#### **Ebrahim Melamed**

For me it was important not to be patchy, and I am not linear so I'm not going to focus on a special line. It's very varied but the artists that I choose, and with a lot of very passionate art, I go in great depth with.

#### **Maria Finders**

So this is Anish Kapoor?

#### **Ebrahim Melamed**

Yes, it's named after his daughter Alba. It has been shown in a lot of shows, and it's a very important work.

#### **Maria Finders**

Are you thinking of bringing external curators in to host shows as well?

#### **Ebrahim Melamed**

Yes, definitely. I've been working with different curators to make great shows. Speaking about curatorial background, there is no one in Iran that has this background right now, unfortunately, so it would be extremely important to have training or a school

somewhere in the Middle East. Maybe we can start one in Iran to give this education because we need it, because I don't have any local curators who can help to install the shows.

**Maria Finders**

I think this is part of the discussion, the education discussion. When you were studying architecture, I mean the architect's role has changed so much today, because an architect is now partly a businessman and an executive. What would you say is the most important change between architects today and those you knew when you were studying as a young man?

**Kamran Diba**

The architects were socially more responsible from my generation.

5.00–5.30

**Vasif Kortun, Director, Platform Garanti, TR.**

Because of problems with the tapes, we must apologise to Vasif Kortun for not being able to provide the full transcript of the presentation of his impressive project in Istanbul, Platform Garanti.

As a presentation to this space, we would like to offer our readers the following introduction:

Located in the most vibrant area of Istanbul, *Platform* acts as a dynamic catalyst for the dissemination, research and practice of contemporary art in the city, and also provides a meeting point for exchange between contemporary artists, curators and critics. In addition, the centre has become a cultural portal for the region; through our residency programme and other initiatives, we work with countries where the structure for a contemporary art scene is forming, but where there are few arts institutions or funding structures to provide further support at this time.

Platform contains an archive of work by more than 140 artists from Turkey, the most comprehensive library of art

publications in the city, the Istanbul Residency Program, and an exhibition space committed to exhibiting contemporary art from Turkey and abroad. Since the centre's inauguration in late 2001, over 600,000 visitors have passed through our doors and we have organised 43 exhibitions, over 120 lectures, 4 major international conferences, and co-published 3 internationally distributed publications.

Our residency programme is currently supported by Dutch, Flemish, Swedish, Basque, Norwegian, Swiss, Greek, French, British and Finnish national and regional funding bodies. With the support of a special three-year grant donated by the American Center Foundation, we were able to invite three artists from South East Europe, the South East Mediterranean and West Asia between 2004-2006. A grant from the Open Society Institute now offers artists from the Caucasus region the opportunity to spend two months in Istanbul. Also, through the Backyard Residency programme, a project under the SEE Mobility Project (Artists' Residences in South East Europe), supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers we invited four artists from the countries of South East Europe between September 2006 and June 2007.

In December 2003, Platform was selected as one of the ten most interesting not-for-profit institutions to participate in Institution2, curated by Jens Hoffmann for KIASMA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, and in 2004 Platform was awarded the 50th Year Grant by the European Cultural Foundation for its contribution to local and regional culture. In 2004 and 2005, Platform acted as the key base for the development of the 9th International Istanbul Biennial and hosted six artists on its residency programme who went on to participate in the Biennial exhibition. In October 2006 Platform participated as one of two invited not-for-profit organizations with 'collecting point' in Frieze Projects at the Frieze Art Fair. Platform is one of the 15 international partners for the Seventh International Biennial exhibition of SITE Santa Fe, NM scheduled to run from June 22 through October 26, 2008.

The institution will enter a new relationship with its constituencies in late 2008 after expansion and renovation is completed. Platform will operate from temporary spaces from October 2007 on and phase out its local activities during this time.

#### **Vasif Kortun**

It is important for Platform to have our residents act as ambassadors, memory units around the world after the thing happens – the word gets around. People stay for 6 months, then if they stay long enough there is the possibility of them to produce work that is much more substantial than a hit and run kind of situation that happens in many projects today.

When the residency started the first year, it went very well. You know we were handsomely and genuinely supported by Western and Northern European institutions. But it immediately ran into a problem one year, which we were expecting but which had to be corrected immediately. If you have a residency program and the artists are only from Sweden, Norway, Finland, and the Flemish community and the countries that have a long history and culture of institutional support, then you're effectively producing a kind of situation that's not hybrid and it creates the wrong picture.

So immediately in 2004 we received a grant from an American foundation to actually work with artists from Southeast Mediterranean and Southeast Europe; that is what we call the Middle East and the Balkans in a roundabout way. This was a three year support grant where we were able to invite artists from Egypt and Bosnia, Slovenia and other nations from those regions, and then once we had that program in place, we added another thing to it, which was a major conference about the Middle East with the Balkans, or if you like, the Balkans as an extension of the Middle East and the premise of that was of course the war in Bosnia in the early '90s. Now we have another grant where we can actually invite artists from three institutions in the Southeast Europe : one in Romania, one in Turkey and the other one is in Serbia, Montenegro. So these three institutions are selecting and



circulating art throughout the whole twelve Balkan countries.

I also have another grant to invite other artists from West Asia. I have artists working in the institution from Armenia, from Kazakhstan... actually we have at the moment an Armenian, a Kazakh, a Serbian and a Dutch artist working in the institution, so in a way the residency got better now in terms of how it should address its locality. Istanbul is the head of a former empire, and that empire is the Ottoman Empire and is the place that held the whole Mediterranean basin and part of Europe all the way to Vienna under control. Istanbul has a responsibility to pay back in humility and that's what the institution is trying to exercise, in its own limited way, and now we are hoping to put another program in action, which we will I believe in Cairo and one in Beirut. These three institutions will also circulate artists between themselves. The nice thing is, and we were speaking about this with William yesterday, because it's the same thing in Cairo, you can ask an artist from Istanbul, "Where would you like to go for a residency?" and say, "We have this fantastic program in Zurich", and they say "No, no". And I say, "Well, where do you want to go"? And they say, "Well, I want to go to Lebanon, I want to go to Cairo, I want to go to Alexandria". So artists, for some reason, are not any longer so fixated on the fiction that there is some West out there where everything is always rosy. Today, circulation and dissemination and education go through another operation. It's a decentralization process.

Of course, when we started we were pretty much alone in this kind of thinking, but now we are not alone. We have collaborative institutions and we have competitive institutions, and there are institutions that are following our programming or are doing it much better, because they have much more money among other things. So we feel at the moment the need to shift again. Part of the shift is in expansion, we hold three floors of this building that you saw at the beginning but now we have the whole building and we have a service building in the back, so the institution will, in about a year, triple in size and it will add an educational component. That had always been my dream, kind of a post-doctoral programme. Then the exhibition, the residency, the

public programmes and the education will form, I believe, will a coherent programme of sorts.

Another thing we did throughout these years was over ninety or so lectures, conferences and public programmes. That was really essential at that time because discussions were not so normalized and this kind of pedestrian discussion is critical because you know someone comes to give a conference to five hundred people and the curator starts to come in. You are only five or ten meters away from them and you have a discussion and then you go out and you drink and then there is a much more informal context to share your work. This brought people closer together and smoothed the edges a bit, and as a result we realized after a while that we had been working almost like an academic institution without making any demands whatsoever. So we are going to turn this experience now into a more formal educational program that will not give a degree but will operate on those grounds. And another thing we do is a lot of hosting. Some of the things you will see here are not things that we did directly, although we did the conferences of course, but we like to call ourselves a "yes" institution. People come in and they say: "Oh we have a problem, we need the space, we have to do this or that." And we say; "Okay, go ahead and do it." But this kind of "yes process" is sometimes too much because it makes everything grey and bland. So we are moving slightly away from the "yes" institution and closer to education and joint projects.

We don't publish much. We've done a few publications but always with international partners. This is going to be one of our next phases; we are going to start publishing and documenting what we do. Most of the stuff just stays on the web and it is doomed to a sort of invisibility.

The archive has always been our strongest point in a way, because we carry about one hundred and forty artist files and most of them are fairly complete and coherent and we are going on with that and there is no stopping us. Of course you get tired of spaces and spaces get tired of you, and the public gets tired of the space, the space gets tired of the public after a while. So after five years

you realize that things get worn down quite a bit. A space becomes a shell in which things are happening so there is some soul searching, in a way, as to what we should be doing in the new arena. One of the things we are doing this year, actually, we open in ten days, hopefully, is we are turning the public exhibition space into a public library and this is actually to test the notion of a public library on a pedestrian street, and to see what kind of filtering process will occur when we have the library and to lead by example on a street in a city in which public libraries are not very visible. We would like to position the public library as a truly public thing, where people come, dream, sit, doze off, sleep, look for friends, look for lovers as well as read and do research and all of these things. All these things make up the beauty of public libraries and should be part of their every-day use.

We have other plans related to the notion of time and the space. Normally we close at eight o'clock and on weekends at ten o'clock, and I realized from the first moment that people actually come to our institution after five o'clock in fact. This means people come to us after work. I never understood the logic of institutions that close at five or six o'clock. I mean there are always weekends, of course, but this always seemed strange to me. So the library closes at six and from six thirty on, just about every day there will be public programmes, reading, screenings, discussions, curated books-of-the-week, curated publications-of-the-week and so on for two and a half months. This will be a test and but it will also really show the strength of the project: it's not exhibition, it's not residency, but it's really a resource.

Thanks.

**Maria Finders**

A very good example of something that other people should be doing more of, opening spaces after six o'clock. That's what kind of brings people together. Thank you very much.

5.30–6.00

**Asma M'Naouar, Artist, Tunis, Tunisia.**

**Maria Finders**

Okay our next speaker is an artist, a young artist from Tunisia, Asma M'Naouar. We started a discussion over the telephone last week, which was very interesting because I didn't know anything at all about art in Tunisia and I want you to show us some of your work. Then we can continue the discussion that we started on the telephone which was very interesting. So do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself and how you kind of started working in art?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Thank you, Maria. I studied fine arts at the Academy of Fine Art in Tunisia and then I had the opportunity to go to The Academy of Rome to continue my studies there. I was actually in Rome for ten years and worked there, and all of my experience as an artist was there. But at one point I decided to return to Tunisia because, in the eighties, I was a Tunisian artist in Rome.

**Maria Finders**

You were a woman Tunisian artist in Rome.

### Asma M'Naouar

Yes, indeed. My experience in Rome was very interesting because it was also a Mediterranean country, so it has a very big link with Tunisia and as another Mediterranean bastion, so our cultures are very similar. But I had return to Tunisia because my Arabic Islamic identity was more important for me, and what I had from the other side of the Mediterranean could also exist in Tunisia. But before that, I went to live one year in Lucerne, in Switzerland.

### Maria Finders

That's a switch.

### Asma M'Naouar

Yes. And that was very different because Switzerland was my first experience in the north, and there I discovered another kind of art: conceptual art. This was twelve years ago. After Zurich, I made another stop on my journey and went to Paris and stayed at the Cité Des Arts. There I discovered another part of the artists work because of being in constant contact with artists living there from around the world.

### Maria Finders

Cité Des Arts is a big students' residence in Paris where students are trained from all over the world.

### Asma M'Naouar

On my journey, the best experience was actually in Venice, where I met an Arab artist. That was actually the first time I had met Arab artist and that was eleven years ago, and this encounter in a way inspired my return to Tunisia in '96 and try to live off my art. It has been a little bit hard, but many changes have occurred in the past ten years.

### Maria Finders

The situation has changed?

### Asma M'Naouar

Yes, but the problem with art in Tunisia, and this affects artists directly, is that it is assisted by the Government. This was very different from Italy, where artists are not assisted. In Tunisia, for example, we have a commission that buys two pieces from every

artist, the bad and the good ones. This could be good, but it is also strange, and over time I understood that it was a form of assistance to help the artist. We have no institutions, no foundations, very good collectors but few ones, so I chose the hard way when I decided to live there.

### Maria Finders

I'd like to just have a look at the work; this is your most recent work.

### Asma M'Naouar

Yes, this is the work of '96. I began with dark colors and working only with natural walls; I have worked for quite while with the Sablier symbol, but in fact my first inspiration was the colour and the light and the subject is not important. It was the beginning in Tunisia, and I had some difficulties, but it was a very important phase of my work.

### Maria Finders

But you could have chosen a pair of shoes. You chose the Sablier, which is the sand flowing and time passing.

### Asma M'Naouar

The measure of time is very important in my work. *(Slide)* This is 2000, and the work has changed because of my interest in structures. I began to put coats of colours, one over the other, and I work a lot by subtraction.

### Maria Finders

But also by transparency.

### Asma M'Naouar

Transparency, yes. There are maybe seven or eight layers of colour here, so it was more interesting work on the light.

### Maria Finders

But it looks almost like a city, like a network structure; it's something that is very much alive.

### Asma M'Naouar

Yes. In this phase I began to work with the Arabic name of the Mediterranean and calligraphy, but I also worked with flowers,

as the subject is an excuse for me to work with colours.

**Maria Finders**

How big are these pieces, are they monumental sized pieces?  
Can we see the work here in Dubai?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes. I have work in the Gulf Art Fair at the El Marsa Gallery.  
(Slide) This is another way I work. The fish that are not fish; it is the skeleton of a fish and I go on scratching more and more and discovering colours and working with the big light. They are monumental pieces.

(Slide) This year, I return to the Sablier with more structure and to see how my work was changing as it has been a reference point for me.

**Maria Finders**

In our discussion last week, what I found very interesting is that you told me that at one point in Tunisia you were actually working as a cultural policy maker. So what had happened? You came back to Tunisia and you were working as an artist and so how did you get involved in cultural politics?

**Asma M'Naouar**

The most interesting thing was that in Tunisia we have no money. This morning, the discussion was very interesting because all the people they were speaking about money. We have no money and I think art needs money everywhere in the world; but money for education. We need artistic education in Tunisia, and in the entire Arab world. Tunisia has a very short tradition with art. Art came to Tunisia with the French colonisation. We are in a way too oriental, and local people dream of art in an oriental way or at least in the way the West believes oriental art should look like.

**Maria Finders**

As something idealistic?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes. When I was in Rome in the academy my teacher said, "Asma, why don't you do miniatures?"

**Maria Finders**

Yes, exotic...

**Asma M'Naouar**

I said I don't like miniatures, and miniatures are not in my culture, they are in the Persian culture. I am Arabic and it is different. So something very dangerous is to think about art like the West thinks about art and that is a mistake. I think now is a very interesting time with this opportunity in Dubai. I hope the Gulf Art Fair gives the chance for new talents from the Arab world. These kinds of discussions are important because we have the opportunity to exchange and to talk about our experience, but perhaps the fair can become more active in art production in the Arab world. I grew up in many countries. I spent two months in Lebanon, worked in Cairo ; I was in Kuwait and in Sharjah for the Sharjah Biennial, so I feel at home in the Arab world and I can see the needs.

**Maria Finders**

Are there cultural exchange programmes that are a little more official in Tunisia? Is there, for example a pavilion in the Venice Biennial that features Tunisian artists or are Tunisian artists featured in the documenta? How are Tunisian artists coming out now?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Tunisians living in the country, I think, are right now a little bit out of the picture. Of course some artists living in Europe are part of the regular art system.

**Maria Finders**

You mean like those of Tunisian origin but French?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes. If you live in Tunisia, you are out of everything. It is all about communication, and coming here today is part of that. Part of the solution can come through understanding more about the problem. If our art is not good, we can work on that. But we need to communicate and debate; for example, in Tunisia we have no curators.

**Maria Finders**

So there is no curatorial practice in the traditional sense?

**Asma M'Naouar**

No. We have people working in the Cultural Ministry that are officials who do the lists... and they don't understand much about the way artistic projects need to be set up.

**Maria Finders**

So it was like the discussion this morning when they were saying that in fact it's beyond the institutions and it's a matter of public policy. It's the Minister of Culture of Tunisia that needs to set up the parameters of artistic exchange. Do you have any ideas about this since you have worked in this cultural policy making as well? How do you see the next ten years, do you see something happening, and what has to happen?

**Asma M'Naouar**

I think in the next ten years the main thing we have to create is communication between artists. This is a big opportunity, this forum, to hear what artists want because the Gulf actually is a market, and the galleries are here. The galleries don't have the same preoccupation in mind, so to create a debate, to create all the structures that are around artists that we don't have. For example, in Tunisia I have to do all the work for myself as an artist, since there are not infrastructures.

**Maria Finders**

It's funny that the professional services around the industry of art is always something we forget, and the fact that you can't transport things if there are no transport companies. Is there AXA insurance in Tunisia?

**Asma M'Naouar**

No we have no insurance. It's difficult and the artists have to think of all these things, everything. They have to think about the work and these things, and few galleries do this work. But I think the education of art is the same thing in North Africa, because I know the situation in Morocco, but we have the problem of our government, which does not assist the arts, but they think we represent them.

**Maria Finders**

Like an official voice?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes. This is the thinking: you are a Tunisian woman, you go to Dubai, so they said to me last week, "Remember that you represent us". I think I represent no one, excuse me. I think I represent myself but all the people there think that artists, singers, artists in theatres are representing the country and it is wrong. We must have another structure that protects us and that creates real centres for the artist and for the artistic work.

**Maria Finders**

Are there artist associations or least not official foundations working there?

**Asma M'Naouar**

There is an art association but it is official.

**Maria Finders**

It's official...

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes, it's official. At the beginning it was quite closed but now it is government association, and after ten years I don't have a card ; I refuse to have a card... It makes no sense because some artists have problems with the government and these associations don't help them, so I don't need to be part of this association.

**Maria Finders**

Are there any official or unofficial contacts between French Tunisians living in Paris in France and Tunisian artists living in Tunisia? Are there any kinds of associations or fraternities between them?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Associations exist. There is France, but it is official and it works with the government. There are laws in Tunisia, but I don't know if it is the same thing in other Arabic countries that oblige these associates to work with the government, so they don't come to work with artists directly and this is the problem.



**Maria Finders**

But if the government is so prevalent, is there government support of the arts of any kind?

**Asma M'Naouar**

Governments support the artists that represent it. But I think I am very optimistic and I think that maybe another structure can exist between Arabic and Islamic countries that can strengthen the position of artists. I think I am part of that culture, we are in North Africa but we have the same handcrafts, the same culture and the same vision, which is most important.

**Maria Finders**

So as a final word, perhaps the gallery system as an independently funded system, would it be a solution that there were more art galleries representing artists?

**Asma M'Naouar**

I am here with a gallery. That is the very important thing because the government says it doesn't have the money to support a manifestation like this. If I don't have my galleries, I would not be here. I was invited by you and am now discussing with you, so we have a chance to have some galleries that are working but all things remain very hard in confrontation of the Western countries on an equal footing.

**Maria Finders**

So the hope is that there is an autonomous market, autonomous associations in a way and always building those relationships perhaps throughout the region that include Tunisia as well.

**Asma M'Naouar**

Yes, this is my hope.

**Maria Finders**

Thank you, Asma.

**Asma M'Naouar**

Thank you very much.

6.00–6.30

**Hassan Khan**, artist, musician, writer, Cairo, Egypt.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**, Serpentine Gallery, Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects, London, UK.

**Maria Finders**

We have a change in programme and I have to explain to you why this has occurred. As you know in every kind of situation, whichever country you're in or from there are always certain situations that involve visas, visa problems. After having started the process for getting Jalal Toufic here, a couple of days ago we realized that it would be very difficult because of a certain technical problems in his visa situation. I also need a visa to go to the US because I'm Greek, so there are many situations that sometimes stop us from truly going forward. It's kind of our fault because we started this programme very late, and so we apologize to Jalal.

We would like to say that Jalal will have an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist that will be published in our book, and we are hoping that next year we can bring him to the show in a very good way, having the time necessary to be able to do all these things that we need to do.

But we do have a very big privilege because when we were discussing with Hans Ulrich who would be one of the people he would really like to interview, he had always told me Hassan Khan. I said that's very interesting; do you want to interview him as a writer, as an artist, which part of him do you want to interview? So I think that this is something that we've been talking about and waiting for and we are very lucky that we can have this interview with him here today. So Hans, Hassan, please join us.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Thank you, Maria. Many thanks to Hassan Khan. I'm very, very happy that we can continue here the conversation which started some years ago in Paris. And I have prepared this interview this afternoon, but as Fellini once said, the beauty of the interview is that there are always unpredictables. Let's hope that there are lots of unpredictable moments.

It's difficult to introduce Hassan Khan because of his parallel universes, with his activities as one of the leading artists of his generation based in Cairo, Egypt; he's also a writer and an editor. He has actually been publishing his own artist-run magazine for many years and he is now one of the editors of Bidoun. I was thinking about this sort of parallel universe, and it reminded me somehow of the poet John Ashbery, who once in the '70s wrote on his different activities as a literary critic and poet, saying that for him, it's all about parallel adventures. So I am very happy to be here and introduce Hassan Khan with all his parallel adventures. We actually decided that we are going to focus today mainly on his work as an artist and I wanted to ask Hassan as the first question to tell us a little bit about the project you have been doing, which was an instruction-based book, which was our first collaboration.

#### Hassan Khan

Well, I thought of a set of instructions that were called *insecure* (2002), so it was a text-based piece, and in a sense it has multiple functions. It actually doesn't matter how we categorize it, but *insecure* (2002) was about what I was working on at the time, which was a kind of analytical perspective of positions held in relation to each other. This is something that actually has changed over the past four or five years. I think my work has moved into a different direction in which function as such or analysis are not enough. I'm looking for a process that I might not understand and to find work or discover work that lies beyond my intentions, and my intentions have only become a layer in my work rather than the goal of the work. So I think *insecure* (2002), which was our first collaboration, our first meeting, came at the time, at the end of one period of working within a certain direction which was heavily focused on persona.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

One of the things which has happened since then. At our very first meeting, you were in Paris for a group show. You were already mentioning your sonic research, and if I think about your sonic installations, they are sort of continuation of this sonic research. And we were saying there are basically two directions in your sonic work: sound as a material, sound as a reference.

#### Hassan Khan

Well, I first started as a musician, as a fifteen-year old guy smashing guitars. That's how I got involved in the creative process. So sound and music have always played a very extremely important part in my work. DOM-TAK-TAK-DOM-TAK, which is the piece you are referring to in Torino, was based on taking an existing subject which is shaabi music, which is a specific music produced in the city of Cairo, an urban type of music, and interfering in the process of production itself. Therefore, what I did was I worked with musicians and studio instrumentalists and I took a crash course, learnt the language and worked as a producer. I produced six tracks that were based on generic moments in that music, in that musical culture, which is an automatic musical culture. It's a culture that is organic and then

recorded with musicians under my guidance as a producer, but I recorded them without them listening to each other and then made a mix master.

This was installed in a specific fashion, but in this work, I was interested in working with the musical culture itself, the culture becomes the material of the work becomes the material of the work. What I'm doing is entering a circuit in which culture is produced in a specific way of altering some of the rules and thus hopefully allowing the musical culture itself to speak in a way to touch this automatic moment. I'm focused on this kind of automated cultural product. In this moment, where human beings are not sure of what they are doing and how a culture is actually produced like a kind of musical language – I was also working on that reference in Tabla Dubb.

Other works of music where I work as a musician, I'm interested in sound as material. I work with feed backing groups. I work with a mixer that emits a tune because it's a mixer and loops it through different filters and processes. I'm dealing with a moment where a material can collapse or not and the music is based on attention. It can collapse because it's based upon feedback and feedback is chaos, basically, so the whole musical experience is related to an attempt at taming that chaos while exploring how surprises arise and then are controlled and shaped. In terms of sound, it needs to be given a certain kind of volume and it's for me like going to the basic roots of a musical experience, away from the language. Dealing with tension, structure, texture that's...

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

In relation to that, I was curious to which extent the city you work in, Cairo, plays a role in your work process. Cairo presents most extreme urban conditions of the 21st century. It's an incredible mutation, and I was wondering to which extent the sonic dimension of this capital somehow enters your work.

#### Hassan Khan

I usually resist speaking about my work in terms of Cairo. But at the same time, especially when it comes to sounds like a piece called Figure and Ground (2006) – This is a one hour audio transmission based on recordings of Friday sermons, which are broadcast over horn speakers all over the city. It's like a moment when the city bleeds in a sense, and I kind of used these field recordings of Friday sermons in a one hour live radio transmission with music while reading my text in the same style and adopting the same style of preachers basically. This is strongly connected to how that city operates in a way and it's similar to DOM-TAK-TAK-DOM-TAK (2005) because it's about a form of translation; cultural products that are again related to culture. I'm always wary of my relationship to my subjectivity. I would like to avoid being an artist whose basic work is only expressing his subjectivity because I think that is quite dangerous in relation to form and in relation to what you're doing. So I think, at least in some works, this engagement with cultural production is again automatic and this allows us to engage with something that's exterior and at the same time says something about an internal condition because it's a cultural product.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

That leads us directly to KOMPRESSOR (2006), which is a recent installation you did in London where many of these issues were compressed, one could say. You created a stage in the exhibition space, a kind of display centre for sound. Can you tell us a little bit about this stage as a unified space ?

#### Hassan Khan

KOMPRESSOR (2006) with a K brings a lot of these themes together because it was an exhibition which was based on translating sets of dreams into different forms by the dreamer. This might sound like an expressionist subjectivity but my interest was to use something as interior and exterior as dreams as a way of discovering new aesthetic forms. KOMPRESSOR (2006) included an architectural element which was the stage, I took different dreams and made them move through a process of translation that led to extremely different works, from an

alphabet book of images to a six-meter image strip, or to a specific video. The stage functioned as a way of unifying the space, but at the same time highlighting, heightening a sense of “performativity”. There were ten one-minute pieces of music based on dreams that interrupted the exhibition every seven minutes. KOMPRESSOR (2006) was attempting to create an exhibition that is not a collection of works in a space and at the same time was not one huge work but rather something in between. It was a modulation between the idea that these works exist separately yet at the same time they speak to each other in a specific fashion.

The other part of the exhibition was a four channel, fifty-two minute piece composed of sixteen different sections, which speak a totally different conceptual language to KOMPRESSOR (2006), and it was interesting for me to have different sets of modulations. With KOMPRESSOR (2006), you’re modulating between the object as a piece on its own and an object in relation to everything around it.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

That leads to another question, the question of who your heroes are. I thought it would be very interesting in the context of talking and thinking about your sonic spaces. There have obviously been a lot of examples in the past if we think about Yannis Xenakis, whom I interviewed about ten years ago. He was thinking about these polyphonic spaces, where he was actually creating environments constituted by sound elements which one could only experience in a specific architectural context. The same was true for Stockhausen, and for environments in the ‘60s and ‘70s. I was wondering if these are references or if maybe they are also influences that have more to do with the context. Would you talk a little bit about this?

#### Hassan Khan

Yes, well in terms of music and sound, it’s really a mixture of extremely strong early influences. I mean when I was fourteen or fifteen, I was into noise music already. I was into free jazz, different things, but at the same time I had a very strong

connection to something like you were referring to. Shaabi music, again, which is specific, and I’m just a fan of it. I like the music very much and I think it’s extremely strong.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Tell us about this music.

#### Hassan Khan

Okay. It’s quite rough, quite aggressive, but it’s sophisticated in another sense and maybe what appeals to me in this music is the promise it has. Somehow I see it as a space in a culture that speaks two tongues, able to verbalize and express things that other spaces don’t and that is part of class politics in that city which I don’t want to get into right now. I have a strong affinity to this music and I’m sure it influences me in certain ways. I’m not a practitioner of the music but I guess I engage with it in different forms.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Another aspect you mentioned before was your more event-based pieces, your monologues or lectures, and I was wondering when we discussed this afternoon, were you thinking of them in relation to this whole idea of “modality/monotonicity”? Could you talk a little bit about this whole aspect of your work and your monologues?

#### Hassan Khan

Over the past three or four years I’ve also been working with extremely charged, tedious, overbearing lecture situations in which music is used a lot, in which a specific logic is taken to its extreme.

Some of these lectures like I’m not what I am (2005)-ongoing) are kind of artist talks in a sense because there is a bit about exploring what I’m working on instead of trying to show people examples of my work, changing the relationship you hold to your audience and the way you make yourself more vulnerable, yet at the same time more authoritative. It’s very formalized and it’s timed, and I have a text that goes with the time code. It’s jumbling up notes, different notes, different papers, and different works to

explore my process. I have done it in different art schools. I've given it to students and it was really quite an intense experience because in one way it is authoritarian and I stand. I begin the talk by saying this is kind of an authoritative situation and I will not shy away from it. I will work with something that I'm calling the charge of truth, which is not a claim that this is a truth as much as a kind of intentionally taking the position of a voice that speaks the truth and, in a way, taking that as a starting point to maybe question that notion, but rather than in a more liberal situation where we assume our positions are similar. We are in a level playing field. I'm attempting to push the situation we're in to monumental size, to the point of intense exchanges of, because basically that's what happens in the process of thinking, I mean I think that's what happens. It is a lecture but it becomes almost like a revealing of a thought process and the people can kind of engage with that and it can become alienating at the same time, and both are entirely welcome. After that's finished, then we have a discussion. Usually these discussions are quite intense because of the situation.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

It's interesting because this whole idea of the lecture as an artistic medium is something Walid Raad has also explored a lot, and I was wondering if you see your practices related.

#### Hassan Khan

I think it's when it engages with situation in terms of role play to an extent. I think I'm more interested in more basic intensification somehow and I'm also not very interested in irony – at least in these works – but I think that's also a major difference.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Maybe it would be good if you gave us another example of how such performative event happens. They have very complex and long titles.

#### Hassan Khan

Okay, there's Nine Notes On Source Process and Product (2006), which actually came through various art works. There was a piece I did in the Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum two years ago called the Improvisation with Voice Talent: Michel Foucault's Of

Other Spaces as Domestic Radio Play (2005), which was a piece that was done in Arabic and it involved a constructed stage in the space. That piece was not translatable; it is a piece that can only exist in exhibition language. The original piece took a philosophical text and broke it down. Through the work of actors, domestic situations were constructed and we used the radio play as a format, and then I took that work and tried to retranslate it into theory through a process which involved a lecture that involved a live concert. It was subtitled Text as Exhibition, Exhibition as Lecture, Lecture as Concert, so it was quite important because it's involved in this idea of translation, which I think is something that I work with all the time, in which content mutates from one form to the other and in that mutation a certain energy is being used. In Nine Notes, I had actual speech and I was playing live music and I had an image, like some kind of image, that was a very simple graphic based upon lines, geometrical forms that kind of engaged with each note. Each note had a certain central concept and I designed these geometrical patterns to engage with that concept – not to illustrate it but to engage with it. So by the end when I actually did this piece, it was a forty-five minute long concert talk. By the end, I think something inhabited the space. This is maybe what I was also trying to reach: even if I'm speaking, you know that the text that I'm delivering has some theoretical base or rational sequence. I'm also interested in something that is beyond that. I'm also interested in the situation itself inhabiting a space using music or using words, or using image, or using delivery.

#### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Two more questions: we've spoken a lot about installations of yours, about performances, but we haven't spoken yet about your unrealised projects. In architecture, a lot of reality gets produced; we are talking about unrealised architecture. Architects publish their unrealised projects, their utopias and then little by little, in time, they get built and in contemporary art we have the most unknown artists with unrealised projects. By this, I mean projects that were not possible in the past parameters of a museum or a gallery or an art fair, projects which are yet unrealised. What are the ambitions in your work?



### Hassan Khan

Well, I can maybe speak very briefly of a couple of ideas. They're not necessarily extremely ambitious so I think they will probably, hopefully, be realised.

I've been working with actors a lot in different ways and I've worked in the theatre as a composer of music, but I've had quite a lot of experience with actors and have been interested in developing a work with two sets of actors, a set that are dubbing actors or people who work with their voice, rather than physical actors. It's still very vague, but hopefully I do engage a long process of exercises, improvisations, etc., and a certain type of actually really tailored work, as in every single actor that I've worked with, I tailor a programme to work with them on. And I'm interested in creating a film work, which rotates around these characters while using dubbing and to work on the voice in a certain direction and to work with the body in a certain direction. It's very important for this piece that it does not become visible. It is not about a huge disparity. It's about a very simple, subtle difference; I'm interested in that: a tiny gap that the audience might not even catch in which the voice says something slightly different to the body, that's kind of...

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

That's still unrealised. Did you have any issues with censorship, projects that have been censored or...?

### Hassan Khan

No.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

Maybe we could talk a little bit about the last question, about your work with writing. You've edited your own magazine. When we met for the first time, you had all these issues of your own magazine and now you're involved with Bidoun. Can you talk a little bit about what it means for you to write?

### Hassan Khan

When we met, I think you referred to Alive, which wasn't my magazine, but I was an editor of Alive. That was a magazine that started in Cairo in the early '90s. It kind of had a very bumpy road to it and died because of financial reasons. But it was separate. I can say first of all, my academic training is in comparative literature so it's never been foreign to me – writing. It's always been part of my process anyway. I don't necessarily differentiate between different fields of activities, but I'm not asking for them to be differentiated. I'm just speaking about myself personally. I work with concepts, ideas, emotions, moments, images, and the sources find the best forms for them. I think with a magazine like Bidoun, which is a commercial object and that's part of why it's important, in my opinion, but of course I work in a different way, because it's a collaboration and it is a commercial object so there are different rules. But I hope that within something like that, I can provide some kind of cultural analysis which is maybe something that I am not interested in doing in my artwork, but in general, I think all different activities feed into each other and you learn something.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

This is a wonderful conclusion. Many thanks, Hassan Khan.

I don't know, Maria, if there is time for questions from the floor or if this shall happen as a coffee break.

### Maria Finders

I think coffee breaks are always good things. That's where we do things best. You invented that, didn't you, the coffee break forum. Thank you, Hassan.

Okay guys this is it for today. Tomorrow morning and tomorrow all day we are going to be talking about culture in cities: how cities are branding themselves through culture, how cities are not branding themselves through culture. We have a big programme on architecture, and I've been reminded to tell everybody that all these conversations are being taped and there will be a publication that will come out in the end.

## Branding cities through culture

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10.30–12.00

Lisa Ball-Lechgar, Editor, Canvas, Cultural Consultant, Dubai, UAE. David Barrie, Director, The Art Fund, London, UK. Jan Dalley, Arts Editor, The Financial Times, London, UK. Donna De Salvo, Chief Curator and Associate Director for Programs, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA. Jean-Hubert Martin, Curator, Direction des Musées de France, Paris, FR. Yolla Naujaim, Collector, Beirut, LB. Otto Peine, Artist, Dusseldorf, DE. Andrée Sfeir-Semler, Director Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg and Beirut, LB. Jill Silverman, Partner Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, FR. **Moderator** Daniel Birnbaum, Director of the Stedelijk School of Art Academy and Portikus Gallery, Frankfurt, DE.

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Because of a recording problem, the introduction of this section is not available. Our apologies to Daniel Birnbaum.

Donna De Salvo

I am very delighted to be here today. This is my first visit to Dubai and it's been really fantastic to be engaged with so many wonderful people. I wanted to talk a bit about the Whitney Museum,

where I am part of the expansion project at the moment. I'd like to go through some slides and give you a little bit of a sense of the Whitney itself and how its own relationship to the city, and then to a larger world, is helping to shape what it was and hopefully what it will become. Can I have the first slide? The Whitney is known for the works of Edward Hopper and this is a quintessential New York City scene early Sunday morning. In many ways it epitomises the New York of the beginning of the 20th century, a romantic place that was sort of brooding and in many ways the easel painting that Hopper did was the kind of work being done at that time.

The Whitney was founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, in response to a lack of appreciation of American art. The first museum that the Whitney established in 1931 was actually the Whitney Museum and Studio Club, so it was a place for practicing art as well as for the exhibition of art. And it was in downtown, on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village, which in many ways was a kind of place of the art scene in Manhattan in the early part of the century.

Then in the mid 50s the Whitney moved to midtown on West 54th Street, not far from the Museum of Modern Art itself, and in many ways, this was a response to a change also in the perception of American art. When the Whitney was founded in 1931, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney felt she had to be an advocate for American art because no one was collecting it at that time, and I know it's interesting to think about New York as a centre and a powerful city, but certainly the status in American art has changed greatly. The Metropolitan Museum didn't collect American art; the Museum of Modern Art did, but the Whitney was the only museum of American art established in the United States that collects exclusively art produced in the United States. Now we will certainly say we have artists who live in Berlin who are American and we have artists from around the world who live in the US; it's very difficult to decide what is American but that's another question.

The post-war era in America and the innovations of Abstract Expressionism in large scale painting brought about a real change in how American art was perceived abroad, and it also brought about a change in the Whitney's building itself in a desire to create spaces that could contain much larger scale pictures of artists such as Jackson Pollock or art by Clifford Still. And the Whitney's collection which numbers 12,000 objects is really quite expansive.

*Next slide:* And so in 1966 the Whitney established a new building in uptown Manhattan on the Upper East Side, which at that time was also a place where the art scene had migrated and you can see that the Whitney building is really embedded within the fabric of an urban residential setting. The Breuer building which was quite radical for its time, even now I think it's really radical, was sandwiched next to a row of brownstones, as brownstones continue to play a real story in our history and if you think back to the Hopper painting that I showed you at the beginning, it says something about the character of New York City. What we are finding increasingly is that the Whitney's collection cannot be accommodated in the building that we presently have.

*Next slide:* This is a slide from the 2006 Whitney Biennial Artists who are using space in a much more expansive way are the real challenge to space and the more easel-based, easel painting presentations obviously are not necessarily things of the past, but not what we all have to deal with. This whole project, it's space built as a cultural space, as a city space and space as a kind of artistic space, space on every level on a certain way and also these are two figures, neither of whom were born in the United States, that the Whitney has collected now and shown and this brings up a whole other question again of how we define what an American museum is in a global world. So we've now begun a project to look into expanding in another location, and this is in the Chelsea area of Manhattan, so this is a slide of the West side of Manhattan.

*Next slide:* And this is the proposed new site for the Whitney

Museum, again Washington Street, and this is at the site of an elevated railroad called the High Line, and the High Line was created in the early part of the 20th century as a way of moving freight and various things through Manhattan and actually into buildings, so this elevated railroad – part of which still exists – has been saved by a group called Friends of the High Line and will be turned into an outdoor urban park, and the Whitney will be the anchor. This is our proposal to be the anchor institution for this High Line.

*(Slide)* This is what the High Line looks like today, it's really just plantings that have come about because of seeds coming from the air, it's a derelict space and eventually what will happen is Diller and Scofidio will design this elevated park and keep it quite minimal so that it will have more of a sense of not a park but the way a city begins to evolve and change and decay and then the decay becomes a present.

*Next slide:* This is what the site looks like now and you can see on the right side is the High Line itself, the elevated railroad. I think that's it. That's the Whitney at the moment and in the future.

#### Daniel Birnbaum

Thanks, that was exemplary; lots of information for us to discuss; thank you so much. New York is a city that has managed to brand itself quite well through art or maybe it's the other way around, we can come back to that. London used to be a place where it would go not to be involved with contemporary art. That has changed radically in a few years, in the last decade or so, and we have several people here and on stage that will talk about London, and I'm not quite sure what David Barrie, the art director of Art Fund UK wants to talk about, but go ahead.

#### David Barrie

Well I wasn't quite sure, but it's starting to become a bit clearer. Let me begin by explaining what the Art Fund is. It's not a for-profit organization. It is a charity set up in 1903 to help keep works of art in the UK, particularly works of art that were threatened by export to American collectors, God help us.

In those days, those kinds of robber barons in the United States were buying up the contents of the stately homes of England and we started out very successfully. One of our first great purchases was the Velazquez Venus which we bought outright and presented to the National Gallery. So in those days we were called the National Art Collections Fund. It was a very nationalistic almost chauvinistic enterprise, though early on we got involved in the business of collecting art from other parts of the world. If I fast forward to today, I can tell you that something like 850,000 works of art have entered public collections with the help of The Art Fund over the last 104 years. We are a membership-based charity with about 85,000 subscribers; we receive no government funding, we receive no funding from the national lottery; we are entirely self-propelled, and I think this is where my brief presentation links closely to the theme of today. We are very much part of the process that I'm sure is going to be referred to a lot, I know it's already been mentioned by Donna, which is in a sense globalization. We are very, very conscious of the fact that if you are in the business of trying to enrich public art collections you need to be looking wider than the shores of the country where you live. It would be an impoverished view of the role of the public art sector, if one imagined that it was merely there to preserve the works of art of the nation state to which that institution belonged. We celebrated our centenary in 2003 and we had a big exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London. We brought together about 400 objects ranging from ancient prehistoric artefacts through to the present day. There were some good examples, if you like, of international contemporary art that we could have borrowed from Tate Modern, though there were physical problems: a wonderful Bill Viola video installation – the *Nantes Triptych* which I expect many of you know. There was a fantastic Anselm Kiefer, and there were things like that but a very interesting fact emerged from this enterprise and it was that museums and galleries in the UK over the previous hundred years, if not longer, had comprehensively failed to collect work by living artists from overseas. So while we were faced with an embarrassment of riches when it came to the old masters –

Rembrandt, Raphael, Michelangelo – great ancient Greek antiquity and so forth, when it came to the 20th century, we were essentially faced with a choice of, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Jacob Epstein, there was very, very little great work that had been bought from living artists overseas. The first Picasso painting to enter the Tate by purchase was in the 1970s. We, in Britain, turned our backs on all the most exciting things that were going on overseas during the 20th century.

The Art Fund, having learned something from this centenary celebration exercise, held a big conference in 2003, an international conference to look at the future of museum collecting and this theme emerged not just from our own experience but I think from that of others too. We decided that there was something we needed to do about this, that if the collections in the UK were going to develop in a way that really did reflect current realities we had to do something to ensure that our curators, our museum directors, raised their sights, looked more widely, and in fact in a month's time, in April, we are going to be launching a big new initiative which is designed to encourage the collecting of non-British contemporary art. And this brings me to the other thought, which it seems to me may be relevant to the discussions this morning, which is, what do we mean by international contemporary art? If I can be a little bit simplistic, maybe even a little bit facetious, one sometimes gets the impression travelling around the international art fair scene, that there are about 300 artists working in the world today, and they crop up everywhere. I think the reality is that the contemporary art world represents a very narrow cross-section of the practice of living artists on this planet today. I think it's really tough, and makes for a really interesting challenge to see how we can make our public collections reflect in any sensible way the extraordinary richness and variety of the artistic practice across the surface of the earth. We are going to do our best with our limited resources in the UK but I can't help feeling that this is going to be a problem that we are all going to confront more or less painfully and with some difficulty in the years ahead. So I think I've said all that I want to for the moment.

### Daniel Birnbaum

Thanks. There are lots of important issues that I think we can get back to here.

Commercial galleries: Jill Silverman works as a partner to one of the major galleries, for the Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery in Paris, but she is also seeing the art world changing and developing from the inside in the way of all major art capitals in the West, New York, London and Paris. Yes, I'm very interested in what you want to present.

### Jill Silverman

Firstly, I would like to say that I am very pleased and delighted to be on this panel. I wanted to talk about Paris, ostensibly and the new energy that is building and has been building there for the last couple of years which I'm very excited about. But briefly for those who don't know me, I've been involved with the care and feeding of artists for more than two decades. And I think this discussion of cultural grounding, which I'd like to open in a different way, is very interesting to me, for a number of reasons. I have worked for a very long time in New York during the dark days of the late 70s and 80s when New York was not the power house that it is now, but was a really a very intact artist community. This was a time when Soho was a place of derelict lofts, colonised by artists who were paying very low rent, when galleries were opening in the same neighbourhood because the artists were there and it was easier to have the gallery down the street from the studio than it was to pay trucking of work. I've seen New York go from a period of relative economic decline to the great artistic power house that it has become and the real estate power house that made it necessary for the artist community to up and move from Soho to Chelsea, which was also urbanism in a way.

London in the '90s was also a place of modest development until the mid '90s when a new generation of artists who had been schooled and raised on the shoulders of very important living contemporary artists suddenly were launched into the world, and London became the IT town and the young British



artists that we all now know as household names first asserted themselves on the scene. And we also saw in London during this period of the Tate Modern which has become part of the branding discussion in subsequent years.

I think that all of us are here in Dubai because we've all been curious about this part of the world, and what we're going to see happen here in the next ten years and for those of us who feel that the art world is a small community, Dubai is just a neighbourhood next door. And I think this is something for those of us who see the art world as an extended family and as a community of like-minded people, whether you are a museum director or a collector or a journalist or a head of an art school or a gallerist, we are all in the same world together and basically our lives are infinitely connected. This discussion of branding always strikes me as something which is quite foreign to my experiences as a gallerist, but we live in a world where big names are applied to certain phenomenon because it helps everyone to understand what's happened. And I think when the "Bilbao Effect" came into common usage, it was because we all watched a New York-based museum with a global idea, that it was possible to take a kind of international culture and place it from one part of the world to another with local feelings taking place at the same time around it, but it's a word that makes me a little bit squirmy because I think that the idea's a very big one and the roots and the ramifications are very deep indeed, and when we are in a new part of the world that has a different kind of tradition, a different heritage, an exciting new future, I think it's quite daunting to pluck a mushroom from one location and plonk it down in another and just take it at face value.

I just have another thing to add here, which is that I think this discussion of cultural branding becomes too fast as well something that happens from the top down, which is this notion of the Guggenheim phenomena and the "Bilbao Effect" and then something that happens from the bottom up and I think that it has to happen in the same universe, this top down, is that we need care and feeding of our artists, we need education of students, of general students of art and students of communities,

this is where the critics, the journalists, the historians, the universities, the great schools, everyone is part of the same package and I think we have to look at the factors that will make it possible to have a rich cultural experience in the new city, in the new country, in the new part of the world. And we have to pay as much attention to growing things from seeds up as well as from throwing as much GDP at a problem and saying, well yes we can hire the world's greatest architects, we can bring the world's greatest collections, all of which is very important but what has made artistic communities special is that cities, whether it was New York, Paris, Berlin, London, Los Angeles, Beirut in its time, these were cities where artists wanted to live and they wanted to live because the rent was inexpensive, they could have their studio spaces, there were teachers in the universities teaching criticism theory and art history, that they felt were important to meet for coffee at the end of the day or a bottle of wine. These were internal combustion engines, and each one of these locations, and I think that you can't have one without the other, if you are going to have real social and artistic content in any new region of the world.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

Thanks so much Jill. Lisa Ball-Lechgar is a cultural consultant, the editor of Canvas, and a person who knows a lot about this part of the world, so please, what's your take on this?

#### **Lisa Ball-Lechgar**

Just to give you a bit of background, I first encountered the branding of cities through culture concept when I went to Glasgow University in Scotland as a student back in 1991. Back in 1990 Glasgow had been the European Capital of Culture so we as students were very much benefiting from the legacy that that title had given us. And the legacy is continuing in Glasgow, they have joined up thinking, government, private enterprise, not for profit arts organizations and commercial galleries have all been working together for a very long time. What the Capital of Culture did was very much what the Whitney is doing, injecting culture into the very gritty urban fabric and using it as a regeneration tool for what was a very hard city. It created

branding city through culture with the Glasgow example, and with Barcelona as well, creates a sense of ownership which is imbedded in the heart of the community, it installed a sense of identity across the city and it creates a circular momentum for continual strategic vision.

The legacy that was left by the capital of culture has been evaluated, and the government and the think tanks and the private enterprises have all worked together to reinvest and take culture to the next step in Glasgow. I'm also at the moment working in South Africa quite a lot, on the side, and I'm working with the government in a region in Johannesburg as well as large companies down there and arts organizations looking at how we can integrate art into the social corporate responsibility strategy for businesses and into government strategy for the regeneration of Johannesburg.

But bringing it back closer to where we are today, I lived in Beirut for three years. I moved to join campus about a year and a half ago, and while I was in Beirut I would stick my nose in frequently in various places and one of them was Solidere. Some of you might know of Solidere. It's the private development company responsible for the regeneration and rebuilding of downtown Beirut. I started to propose that what Beirut needed was a cultural strategy. It needed a framework upon which to bring all the fantastic work and creative production that is being done to framework it within a structure that the government and Solidere can use to plan for the future. The joined-up thinking wasn't there. It was proposed to the board of Solidere, and the World Bank was prepared to put in a very substantial amount of money to create a cultural quarter in Beirut with a chairman of a property company. They felt that it was irrelevant. Anyway you keep going. With mentioning the World Bank – I think whatever you think of the World Bank – they have done a lot in terms of embedding culture into the hearts of societies, assimilating, and bringing culture together so it becomes not only a creative force and a good brand for a city or a town but also a vital and integral economic factor. If you look at the city of Fez, for example, in Morocco, the World Bank has pumped millions of dollars into

restoring the heritage of this very historical city and through their poverty alleviation strategy and their intent to bring civil society to Morocco.

The same has been said for a small town which is on the coast of Morocco. If you go there, a lot of money has come from the European commission, which has helped to train local craftsmen to create projects that not only can be sold on their stalls in their town, but can also be exported to the larger cities of Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier and also into Europe and into other economic markets.

But going back to the title of this piece, Branding Cities through Culture; culture you have to understand what you're dealing with on a national context. The British Council has been doing quite a lot of work like this in recent years. They've been creating mapping projects and they did one recently in Beirut and the American University of Beirut, where they've tried to map the creative industries of Lebanon. Now that may sound quite simple in London or Glasgow, or Berlin or Barcelona, but when you're dealing with a country where the Minister of Health doesn't know how many hospitals he has in his portfolio, mapping culture in Beirut and the country of Lebanon is a huge achievement and that is continuing. Within the UAE context now, because we're here in Dubai, one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates, and the interesting thing here is that as opposed to the West, where all the cities, glorious cities like Paris and Barcelona who have had many hundreds of years to develop and integrate the culture into the urban fabric of society, there is this infrastructure there, galleries talk to each other, governments fund the arts. That is something you don't get here to such an extensive amount. There is dissemination of the arts; there is ownership of the arts; society has taken ownership of the arts to some extent. You look at the United Arab Emirates and you're looking at new cities.

Forty years ago, there was nothing here. There were some old houses down by the creek in the last thirty-five to forty years, and this has come up. I don't know what the property developers

were on but they've done an amazing job and it is a big bright, sparkly building, but it lacks a soul and that's where culture can come in. People say to me within the UAE, "Oh, there's no culture". There is plenty of local culture. From the first church in the Arabian peninsular that has been discovered off Abu Dhabi, right through to all the new works by many local artists, the UAE has a very vibrant art scene, but it's a very quiet art scene. The trick for the UAE is that they have the economic means, unlike Beirut or Cairo where they don't have the economic means, but they have the cultural creativity. It's the flipside here. We have the money, but we don't have the joined up thinking and we don't necessarily have the huge and powerful cultural creativity and manufacturing. So in essence, the UAE has to join up thinking. Abu Dhabi has to start to not only bring in the expertise of the Guggenheim, of the Louvre, the School of Architecture, but also empower its own society citizens to educate themselves, to establish, as you say, art schools in this part of the world, and curatorial practices as well.

I was down in Abu Dhabi a couple of months ago for the unveiling of Saadiyat Island, which is the Island of Happiness that the cultural district will be on, the Louvre, the Guggenheim, Hadid's performing arts centre and so forth, and a gentleman from the BBC came up to me and asked me, "Can you buy culture?" And I said, "If you've got the money, of course you can buy culture. But can you embed culture into people's hearts with money? No, no; no we're not that cheap."

Abu Dhabi is bringing in the great skills and they are spending a hell of a lot of money. Now it's time for all the government and the private enterprises and the cultural forces within Abu Dhabi to now start to join up and work together on a strategic vision and assert their own identity on what a very international projects. Dubai needs to do the same, but Abu Dhabi is one step ahead of Dubai. Thank you.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Thanks so much. Jan Dalley has a background in publishing and literature. She is now the arts editor of the Financial Times in

London and the only person on the panel working for a major newspaper. She follows developments of official art all over the world. We're very curious about what you have to say about our discussion here.

**Jan Dalley**

Well thank you, and I certainly will talk in a second about the press, which I think has got to be my subject on this panel. But I think first of all I'd like to just comment on the fact that the first four speakers have all talked about history. They've all talked about the depth of cultural roots, and if we go back to our theme, the Branding of Cities, it's beginning to emerge, I think, that we don't quite think you can brand a city, or at least not that easily and not that quickly. I think we're all very excited by the existence of this art fair and the first Dubai art fair which is why we are all here, but in fact if you looked at it from a great distance you might see that there is some historical continuity here.

Only a kilometre or two down there at the creek there is the gold souk, you could say what we have here is the modern gold souk. Art is the 20th century gold and here the great strength, the historical strength of Dubai as an entrepreneur as a free port, is simply reasserting itself and it's doing what it knows how to do very, very well which is trade, which is not the same as proper culture. I think that's actually what all of our four speakers so far have been saying. Of course it's a first step, but it is only a first step. I think that's something we can all explore more and I would like to take a little further what everyone has said about education.

Everybody has said that it's very important, that's how you get there, that's how the first step becomes another step, becomes a big, big stride, and I think that the other aspect of society that you do need for a healthy cultural life is a healthy press. Now I know that journalists regularly feature at the bottom of the least popular professions in the world. I think we come lower than dentists and that's really saying something, and so in particular, in England, where we have a lot of press and a lot of people

writing all the time about culture and about the arts and about visual arts, we don't value our critics very much. In fact on the whole, in New York critics have a higher status. In London what we do to critics on the whole is throw things at them, and this is probably right because it's part of the healthy atmosphere. Critics can distort, they can distort the market. They can distort the perception of an artist. They can't very often ruin a young artist because luckily there are lots of them and one person's opinion doesn't count that much, but they can certainly do absolute wonders for a new enterprise, for a new way of thinking in the community. And I think it's very, very important throughout the world to look at the health of the press when you are looking at cultural life.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

Thanks so much. We are at an art fair, as we know. The key people at art fairs are not only gallerists, artists as people or key people at art fairs, but collectors. So Yolla Naujaim is a collector from Beirut.

#### **Yolla Naujaim**

Thank you, but I am not really a big collector. I have the title of collector but I'm an architect and I'm involved in art and design and because of my job and because of my chance to be living between Beirut and Paris and working between Australia, Kuwait and all those countries, I've been asked to be here because I do represent a sample of normal citizen in the Middle East who is interested in art, and I wish it was a Dubai person taking my place. I happen to be from Beirut.

What we've heard so far here was very impressive, but I think it's far away from the reality we live with in the Middle East, and I will just give you a small example about the art fair of Dubai first. Half of the people I know in Dubai weren't aware that there was an art fair in Dubai, so this concerns the press. And then when they came for the first time to see the fair it was like a party. But all this is good because it started something. We can never brand a city as a cultural city without an administration and a population of, let's say, art collectors, galleries and people interested in art. And if you take Dubai today, you have the first art fair in Dubai

but this won't go anywhere unless there are a variety of galleries, of people and that interest builds. And this will be a challenge in the first ten years because Dubai has this specificity, which is that a lot of people who are here are not living in Dubai, but are here on contracts for work. It's a migrated society that lives here and then moves away. This population has not real roots in Dubai and I think we have to take this into consideration. It's hard to tell how the real Dubai people will react to the fair or any movement of culture for that matter, and it is also important to consider the foreigners living in Dubai. This is a complex community – nothing like Paris or London or Berlin.

Beirut is a city where we have a lot of things going on, but unfortunately the authorities have other priorities right now than to think about art. With all the problems of uncultured rulers that we have it's a big problem but nevertheless collecting art in Beirut now proves that life can be always there. We were trying to put a foundation or cultural centre in Beirut because we have a league of museums. We cannot afford to have the Louvre, but at least we aim to create a cultural centre where people can meet or artists can be invited or maybe if they offer their art. Encouraging such projects in Beirut and across the Middle East could be part of the mission of the Gulf Art Fair as it could also build momentum for the fair. I hope you all heard and that we are going to have the foundation soon. Thank you.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

Thank you so much. Andrée Sfeir-Semler is someone from a German context. She runs a very important gallery in Hamburg. She has also managed to create a real bridge between cultures, her gallery is not only in Hamburg but also in Beirut, and it will be very interesting to hear how you see these developments and the possibilities here.

#### **Andrée Sfeir-Semler**

Thanks for inviting me. I opened my gallery in Germany in 1985 because we had war in Lebanon and we couldn't open a gallery in Beirut, and in fact my concept has always been carry things out from the region and bringing important propositions

to the region. I started in the Diaspora, in the very North of Germany and I started looking at art being created around me and my idea has always been making unknown artists known outside their frontiers. This means artists related and rooted in their context, and in order to bring up levels in this Diaspora, I showed very early in the game, the most important artists in the region of the Middle East. Three years ago we celebrated our twenty years in Hamburg, and as times were more peaceful in Lebanon in the beginning of the 90s, the ground floor of the gallery became an open space where many things were going on and many artists were starting to work. As peace was back and you had a hunger for creation, a hunger for expression and the artists had a lot in there and they were waiting. When you look at what all these artists who were creating could find, people really carry their work and that's why I decided to open a gallery in Beirut.

I thought about a foundation or a gallery, and I went for gallery because I thought in order to make a real impact you have to sell the work and bring it into the homes. You have to engage everybody, you can't just go begging for money for a thousand dollars here and a thousand dollars there. You have to give money to the artists so that they can live and go on producing. Today we have several artists, some very young. The youngest is twenty-three. We let him go to university in New York and he is studying there. He is a brilliant young boy and he is hungry to exhibit, and he says, "Andrée please show my work at art fairs," and I say, "No wait. It will come early enough. Wait and work so we observe what's going on." We help those artists. We talk with each other. We converse. I make studio visits and the ones that can express themselves, we carry them and we bring them out to art fairs. We sell them to museums, so we carry our local expression, our root out in the world and we are showing in a space in Beirut which is 1,000 square metres big, bringing artists from elsewhere, so we have a show now from Rivane Neuenschwander 'I wish, I wish', and our next show will be a show curated by William Wells from the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo for the contemporary art scene in Egypt because I also think that we have to communicate within the Arab countries. Our only chance in this region is to

just hold hands and work all together and Beirut is one seed and can bring what it can.

Dubai has other qualities, it has money and it has the energy. Look at this city and you will see the growth everywhere, so I really think that we all can get somewhere and in terms of globalization and the world is now so small and we want to bring our own identities and to be out and show the world that we have our own art. We are not looking westwards to find work, but we have an oriental art based and rooted in this region but which looks out at the world. Thank you.

#### Daniel Birnbaum

Thank you so much. Jean-Hubert Martin has been Director of major institutions in several countries Paris, to Pompeii to Düsseldorf, in Berne in Switzerland, I don't know from which perspective you will talk. He's also been involved I think in discussions about the French collections in this country. Jean-Hubert Martin, go ahead.

#### Jean-Hubert Martin

I have been involved in the recent negotiations between the French National Museums and Abu Dhabi for this new Louvre Abu Dhabi. The reason why Abu Dhabi approached the Louvre and the French Ministry of Culture, is because the Louvre has this fantastic collection of art treasures from so many different cultures and from different periods of time, but probably also because there is a great know-how about running museums and creating museums in France. And this started actually in the 70s with the Centre Pompidou. Let me just remind you about the context and how this whole story started. We should never forget that the Pompidou was created by President George Pompidou because he wanted to do something for the Parisian public about living art, about the culture after '68. He was 68. This was the momentum which created the Centre Pompidou and it was a struggle at that time because it was a very difficult stance in those days. I was involved in the beginning, of the whole story, and for the young people at that time, this idea that your institution for living culture was created by a right-wing



reactionary government, given the fact that almost everyone was a Marxist, was very difficult. We were told at that time that people were looking at us like the culture police when we were working there as young curators. The reason for the choice of this particular building was also because the jury was made up of people who were in their fifties, sixties and seventies and they were absolutely frightened by this '68 movement and what the culture could be or could become. This was why they chose this building made by two young architects that nobody knew at that time – they were absolutely unknown – and which was like a shoebox, because it had to be a building that needed to be reused for many different purposes and that could evolve into something completely new ten years later and so on. But it actually proved to be the right decision because the Centre Pompidou has changed the functions inside the building several times and thirty years later it is still functioning.

It was the first museum in France but probably also in Europe to use marketing and communications, which at the time was considered totally vulgar, and we were not so proud about that, but it was definitely a way to be much closer to the public and to listen to what the public wanted to see and what it was interested in. And this changed completely the way museums have been designed and run ever since. This also gave way to a number of new ideas at the Louvre, at the Musée Guimet and a few other institutions that have helped to shape culture in Paris.

I think what the Centre Pompidou brought into the 70s was a place for discussion because there was not only the display of works of art in the collection and the temporary exhibitions, but there was an enormous programme of lectures, of panels and people were coming there constantly to discuss things and to discuss issues of culture. When the Centre opened in '77, all the French intellectuals were predicting a complete failure and it was probably because people were able to talk about culture but also about politics and many other things, and this exchange was very appealing and very successful – so successful that it was something that was copied by many other big museums. I have just named and even the Grande Louvre is organizing constantly

debates and lectures and cinema programme and so on, and this is how museums are seen today.

Just a few words about some other towns in which I worked; I was for seven years director of a museum in Düsseldorf (Kunst Palast), and Düsseldorf has succeeded really to brand the city with its museum. I mean it has two big museums, one only for 20th century art and the other is more of a collection but with a very broad programme in very many different directions. There is still plenty to do to put Düsseldorf on the map, so to speak, of the big art museums, but I think it has partly succeeded and it shows how much a city can do with museums and with culture when it really supports it.

I knew some other situations like in Bern in the 80s, I was head of the Kunsthalle which is a very small institution. At that time it was run by four people, but with an incredible recognition everywhere. The 80s was a very interesting and challenging time for culture as there were much fewer museums than today, of course, and at a certain point the city in the 90s had less money for culture and the public funds were not there any more. At that point they probably could have just closed the Kunsthalle and then suddenly there was a petition for the Kunsthalle, and this institution which rarely got more than two or three thousand visitors for each exhibition, and could have been considered of little importance, actually became very important and even essential to the City of Bern, as half of the population signed this petition.

One should always keep in mind that it's not only the attendance of a museum, the number of visitors that makes its importance in the city because sometimes people who go there once in their life, still know it's there and they think it's important and they want to keep it because it's part of their heritage and of the cultural image, of their city. If I have a few more minutes I could say a few words about Abu Dhabi if you want.

**Daniel Birnbaum**

Yes I think everyone wants to hear about that, so two minutes if you please.

### Jean-Hubert Martin

I would like to thank David Barrie for what he said about the numbers of artists practising today. I think the museum of contemporary art is here to correct what the market doesn't do. We have the feeling if we only look at the galleries, that there are three hundred internationally known artists and it's the task of the museum and the cultural institution to correct that and to show this incredible richness that is out there around the world.

In Abu Dhabi, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is going to open in 2012. It will be built by Jean Nouvel and a collection will be established and will be grow there over time, which will start with the French National Museum, the Louvre but also the National Museum and the City Museum, providing three hundred major works on temporary loan. This amount of works that will be there for the duration of six months to two years will diminish over time, going down to about one hundred and fifty works over a ten year period. So this loan is to start the museum. The French museums will lend these major pieces to Abu Dhabi, then there is an agreement that for fifteen years the French Museum will provide four temporary exhibitions a year, one large, one medium and two small. These exhibitions can originate in France but also elsewhere, it's just a question of putting the Abu Dhabi Louvre in the network of international touring exhibitions. The collection and the exhibition will reflect what we usually say at the Louvre in Paris, that it's a universal museum representing all cultures and all periods which also can include modern and contemporary works. You may know that the Louvre has started now a programme with living artists and they constantly make little exhibitions of interventions with artists. This will also be the case in Abu Dhabi. And then there is a separate agreement between the Louvre itself – the first one I just described was with the Minister of Culture and there is a separate agreement between the Louvre of Paris and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. In this agreement, the Louvre Abu Dhabi can use the name Louvre for thirty years and of course the French part will have in the first period to build up the whole structure for the museum, to help build the program and also to set up staff for the museum.

### Daniel Birnbaum

Thanks so much. This operation is of course a major example of what we were talking about and which is quite close to the title of this talk, Branding a City Through Culture, with a brand which is the strongest brand maybe in the whole business, the most famous museum sending three hundred masterpieces. I think we could come back to it but more importantly we have one artist, the only artist in this whole discussion, and expectations on art seems to be enormous, the machineries of the advertising and the marketing and the museums and collections are running and so what is the place of an artist in this kind of world? Otto Piene is an artist from Düsseldorf working in the US for many, many years. He's also an important teacher, and education is also an important theme that we have only touched upon. Otto has been involved in MIT for many years. Please what is your perspective of all this discussion?

### Otto Piene

Thank you, I should say I am really quite glad to be here. It's a situation that I have never seen before, that I've never experienced the presence of this air, which seems to be charged with energy, intentions and expectations. There is so much virtual reality as opposed to actual energy as opposed to reality here. It reminds me of all the seminars that I have been to as a student and it's all a great promise, and I haven't experienced that in a long time.

Now talking about promise when I have listened to the distinguished panel presentations, I have had the impression that I'm amongst a great community of planners – this grand planning that I hear about, these grand projections that I hear about and it's really planning from a fairly advanced stage of the community of art and artists. And it's planning from a platform that assumes that planning is the thing. You make yourself a plan as well as man can plan and on from there. I would just like to bring up a few counter examples – they are not counter examples but they are examples I have experienced that I have been through since I was sixteen, seventeen or eighteen; something like that. I met when I went to the Düsseldorf Art Academy first a bunch of young fellow students, and we were all

longing for some work space outside the school and we finally found a ruinous space because it was shortly after World War II, so it was a space with a leaking roof, and rust falling down on fresh paintings... and we shared this ruined space and in the ruined space we worked more or less simultaneously and one of the outcomes was the founding of Group Zero. In 1956/57 a group formed initially of two people, then of three, then more and more people. And it was not so much a matter of definition but a matter of practice that we went by the maxim “artist do it yourself”, meaning whatever it is that you don’t have, make it yourself, whatever it is that you don’t have, that you’re not given, work it out yourself. So make a space. If nobody gives you a museum, make a gallery. If nobody gives you a gallery, make an organisation. If no one gives you an organisation... we made our own publication called Zero, and we made our own gallery called ‘The Night Exhibitions’ that existed for only one night because during the day we were working. We were all teachers. We weren’t exactly teaching what we were practising, so out of that came many consequences of one that from that small focus, from this nucleus, objects migrated on the one hand and on the other hand came to us. And Group Zero became a power group joined by such very strong artists as Yves Klein or John Tingley or Piero Manzoni and they all became identified with what happened in Group Zero. From this nucleus in this ruinous ugly studio in Düsseldorf, things migrated to other places. It became the first network that I have experienced and became the first experience in “globalisation”. In other words from a very strong nucleus developed a very strong network that in a certain way is active and is productive to this day.

The second time I experienced this development was when I was invited to be a fellow at MIT at the Centre of Advanced Visual Studies that was founded by Gyorgy Kepes, and it became the first institute in the world dedicated exclusively to the interaction of arts, science and technology and dedicated to the integration of art into science and engineering practices. And it became the first place where I founded a grant aided programme, interdisciplinary by definition, that still involves arts as we know

them connecting also with architecture, elements of science, elements of engineering and an integrated programme usually fashioned individually to the needs and inclinations of individual students, and from that came an ever growing group of young artists or of young creative people for whom we still don’t have a name, who are as expert and as experienced and as capable in the fields I mentioned. And they become a new person, a creative person who can indeed work in these fields and attract people from single fields who will then become familiar and experts of an integrated approach not only in work, not only in media, not only in sky art, not only in urban art and environmental art, but also in teaching.

Now we are teaching what we’ve learnt, what we’ve experienced and carrying it on so that here we have another global network of students of this integrating practice in this integrating desire who carry on their experiences in a very direct way right from having learnt, right from having worked, right from having been acknowledged, which also has happened in the meantime to carrying it to young people to the new generation, to new generations because every art form, every cultural change, every cultural layer needs its own teachings, needs its own schools, needs its own torch bearers that will then incite new fires incite new passion to inform and inspire a new generation, so this is one of the points I feel like making.

I am leaving out many other points because we don’t want to cover too much at once, but one point is yes, there have to be the schools just as the much hated and the much liked as the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, which we hated while we were there, but it became an important school because of our fellow neighbours, one of them is in the exhibition here. Our neighbours were people like Beuys like the other Zero artists that in the current art world have a good ring and a good echo and the same happened at the MIT. There were neighbours there who weren’t artists only, who weren’t exclusively colleagues in the traditional sense, they were scientists, they were engineers, they were incredibly inspired and inspiring and brilliant people. We hated part of our neighbours because we

were critical and they were critical and we didn't always agree, but that's a good thing because if we agree too much then we end up being very complacent and that doesn't necessarily lead to new developments. So one more thing, not a new school, not a new focus – a new nucleus can be formed from nothing, all the time, everywhere. On the other hand the becoming of new generations takes time, namely generations so this instant renewal is fine and it's wonderful and it's very adorable and admirable but there must also be time for the young people to grow up and develop their own views and their own practices, so that's how schools work.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

Can I ask a question about that? I think you touch upon things that have been present here already: the importance of time, of letting things happen. There is a sort of limit to what you can plan as you say and sometimes things also just happen. There are initiatives that may come from people, like most of us and especially those working with institutions and planning and there is a lot to be done in terms of support and facilitation. What Andrée is doing with so much energy all the time now is helping, making artists visible, and some have already become world famous thanks to her efforts. But beyond exposure, in terms of education, knowing your experience, what could an art school be here, in Dubai?

#### **Otto Piene**

One concrete thing I have to say is that the Bauhaus was built on an existing school and you could find that about a lot of other schools. The Düsseldorf Academy was essentially built on the old Düsseldorf Academy, so anywhere there are schools, anywhere there are art schools, craft schools, design schools for all these things, and it is the existing schools on which the new schools will have to build in order to accomplish something that is not totally methodical, pursued from scratch, starting with nothing and hoping that something will happen at the end, whereas the end is very far away. So to work with what's there is a very important beginning and to work with what's there with a vision is necessary and that will probably mean that for the renewal of schools, for

the re-orientation of some of the existing institutions, people are needed from all over the world. When we started our studies we were a bunch of fellows coming from all over the world to one specific place, and the one specific place was a new institute called CAVS, and the same is true in many existing academies or whatever schools we want to use as examples, they invite as many people as they can find and some of them stay, some of them migrate and become the nomads that often cited these days. That's part of your global network based on local developments and the experiences that people bring from their origins into the communal situation on a grand scale.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

"Working with what is there", is what you said and I think is very important because it means it's something that is not just brought in from the outside.

To bring in things from the outside is also good because local is not just there, but it is also produced actively all the time with things that come from the outside and I think Donna you wanted to react or say something related.

#### **Donna De Salvo**

No I totally agree about the school. I think there is a real problematic in talking about terms like branding, which is a very corporate type of term. So maybe we need to separate out a theoretical discussion from a practical discussion. There is a whole discussion about aesthetics, art and the more theoretical philosophical side of what art means in a culture. It would be presumptuous of me to suggest that's what should happen here because it assumes that everything is the same everywhere and that things mean the same wherever one goes and I don't necessarily subscribe to that. And yet on another level there is the market which probably has the ability to transport things all over the world, so I almost feel one has to separate it out, and what you're addressing schools through things that are about art itself. Things about the notion of aesthetics are sort of one component of this and then this other component which is branding and which is a much more recent phenomenon.

I was at Tate Modern for five years and the Tate was brilliant in how it branded itself, but that came at the end of the process, an evolution over many, many years of mistakes and deficiencies. And New York is at another place in its life. So we are talking about places themselves that are at all different speeds and I think that it is difficult to address this complexity through one term, and I think I hate the term “branding”. Maybe that is what I’m saying.

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

One thing was brought up by David which has to do with the importance of supporting pluralistic or heterogenic situations, the importance of reminding us that art can be many, many things and that there are not 200 or 300 artists, and there’s a kind of pre-understanding of the market being homogenised. I feel that very strongly here and on the other hand what I find interesting is what Andrée said that no, a foundation could be effective but in the end to run a commercial gallery could be more effective. It’s not an enormous gallery but it’s a very visible place from my point of view of my work in Germany. It’s almost like a little tension here as we have on the one hand the market being something which dictates and then there are museums and other forces coming in and reminding us all that there are many artists, and on the other hand we have a single individual who says no, the gallery is the best thing, because I can help these artists, I can push these art works into the houses, and I will support single individuals, maybe you want to say a few more words about that?

#### **Andrée Sfeir-Semler**

We are at the base and I am not at all with what Jean-Hubert, and David say about their being a lot of great artists without galleries. Galleries are really like cats standing there and waiting all to find a good talent and you have to be so fast. For example, there was the diploma show in Hamburg University at the Art School and we were all there. No colleague was looking at the other one – really like poker faces – because all of them wanted the one artist who is really more interesting than the other one. You may say that many artists are not in galleries but there are so many galleries and they are all waiting for very good art and I think that without

galleries there would be no art today. Museums come to us and select the crème de la crème but how much do we need to fight until we get them there?

#### **Daniel Birnbaum**

But still what David and Jean-Hubert say holds some truth which is that most of us cannot remember so many artists, 200 is quite a big number and that’s probably why the brain starts thinking how many more can I remember, do you want to elaborate a little on what you said?

#### **David Barrie**

I think you’ve said a lot of it again very clearly. I am concerned about homogenisation. This whole process of branding is to some extent the process of homogenisation and I think probably what the Louvre is doing with Abu Dhabi is terrifically exciting and important and it will produce something wondrous, but it is not enriching diversity. I wonder whether the strongest brands are not ultimately the ones that are the most individual, the ones that express powerfully, if you like, the regional or local character of a place. If one thinks of the great cities of the world the ones that spring to mind are often the great historic cities, like Kyoto for instance in Japan, or Venice where there is something. There is a kind of distillation of a historic culture in great depth representing the creative processes and the imagination of countless artists and writers and other contributors to the cultural feel. I suppose in the end what one hopes is that there will be more and more cities, more and more societies that have the time to develop that kind of layered individuality which of course today will also reflect global realities as well. I was puzzled when I was asked to speak on this subject, first of all because I know very little about branding, but puzzled also by the sense that there is this, as you say, a kind of tension between the homogenizing requirements of the branding process and the need to respect and cultivate the artistic creativity of the individual which ultimately rests at the heart of the greatest manifestations of civilization.



### Daniel Birnbaum

I think we could all agree that maybe we could make the title better and by saying something like “enriching cities through culture”, and then that question is: which kind of culture? That would probably be the big thing. What does culture then mean? Does it mean things you bring in or things that happen? We all have ideas about this; maybe you, Jan?

### Jan Dalley

Well, just before we leave the subject of branding, I'd like to say that I work for a newspaper that is supposed to know about these things. I think that we should be talking about re-branding places through culture. The brands grow by themselves, and cities have a brand as you've just said. Dubai already has its brand, and everybody in the world knows the name of Dubai and they know what they associate with it. They associate it with phenomenal growth. They associate all sorts of things we've seen around us. Art is used to and culture is used to re-brand cities and this is the very opposite of the real discussion about the growth of culture...

### Daniel Birnbaum

What is still very important is that these incredible exhibitions in the whole world now give the opportunity to people who before had no chance to see real works of art whether it is ancient art or contemporary art, and I think it's important. And then to the question of Andrée. Of course I support Andrée's work and have been following her artists for several years, and I think the market has a very important role in picking up artists that we wouldn't know otherwise and to bring them to our view. This is obvious. But in the world there are many more artists that are not labelled as artists, people in Africa, who produce work but no gallery will ever be interested in them because you cannot rely on them. You cannot ask them to produce regularly works to provide sufficient amount of pieces for the market to be shown in the art fairs and in the gallery. Maybe one time you can collect ten works and then during two years they do nothing or they do something later. There is an incredible amount of people like that in the world and they escape the market. The visions and the institutions should be much more careful about that and this exists in Asia,

in China, in Africa and maybe Europe even. Then the second thing is for instance, just to take as an example an exhibition I made in Düsseldorf, on what is today religious art. Why is the West today and the Western institution never interested in religious art of the world today? Because of colonialism and modernity combined, we have completely marginalised this question. There is an incredible richness of works being done today in ritual, religious, magical whatever situations that never come on the market because they don't fit in our dogma of modern art and this is a problem.

### Maria Finders

I am just going to say that Daniel and Jill have to get on planes right away, otherwise they're going to stay here forever, which is what we want them to do. So I'm going to do the Q & A now with the audience and thank Daniel and Jill.

We still have a little bit more time to go through this discussion, because in a way it's all about clusters as well. I remember in Lausanne when Asher Edelman opened a foundation, all of a sudden in Lausanne people said Lausanne is going to get on the cultural map because some person opened up a cultural foundation. And what happened was that a lot of galleries came into Lausanne because of that foundation seeing perhaps and opportunity to create a kind of cultural capital in Switzerland because of this driving force. What in fact was created was a cluster, and clusters are natural poles of attraction. In turn, the fine art school went up in size because of many people believing that now that there is a foundation, that there should also be a good art school that goes, and commercial galleries and non commercial art associations, even dance and theatre underwent the influence of this new élan. Then one day Asher Edelman, being a private person with no public funding, closed the foundation because it was not sustainable for him as a private individual and all the galleries left. So, in a way, these things are not just about branding. They're about sustaining that brand and making sure that the brand is upheld by communities of people who really do have something to contribute. Do you have something to say about that? And yes we're also talking about money here and you should talk about that.

### David Barrie

I certainly do have something to say about it, from a UK context. I mean my own organisation, The Art Fund, not only provides money but also lobbies and campaigns on behalf of public institutions, and in Britain right now there is a real threat to the capacity of museums and galleries to go on developing their collections. I don't think Britain is unique. All public institutions that are operating within the market are faced with rising prices, but in Britain we have government institutions that are frankly very uncaring about the need to develop collections that there is a tendency to think that we have great museums and galleries. Why do we need to put more money into developing them? It's fine to put up new buildings. The Tate Modern is terrific, but actually enabling institutions like Tate to move forward creatively and intelligently building collections for the future, collections which reflect the true diversity as I was talking about earlier, of what is going on around the world – this is not recognised by the politicians and we need to bring every pressure to bear on them to recognise this.

I'd like to mention a trip I paid the other day to Bilbao, to the Guggenheim where there was an exhibition of the work put together by a private collector, Jean Pigozzi from Switzerland of contemporary African art, mostly from Francophone Africa. I must confess that out of the twenty five or so artists represented, only one or two were familiar to me and it was an astonishing display, amazingly diverse, much of it I would not have guessed had come from Sub-Saharan Africa at all. Some of it came out of obvious traditions but it struck me that it was a shocking fact that in Britain at least we were not getting the chance either to see that particular exhibition or more importantly to see any art of that kind at all, curiously enough outside the British Museum. The British Museum alone, the ethnographers, in the British Museum were doing something to collect that kind of art, but if you like the people from the art historical background, the typical curators operating within that rather narrow modernist tradition. Have absolutely failed it seems to me to grasp the significance of what is going on in just that one small area

of the world. I think this is a story that one could repeat many times over and it seems to me that we have all of us a great responsibility to open our eyes as far as we can to that rich diversity.

### David Barrie

Are there any questions from the audience, anyone who wants to comment?

### Audience

I think the “Bilbao effect” is relevant to Dubai in particular because of what the Guggenheim had in Bilbao. I think twelve, fifteen years ago it was just a raw area and developers were trying to create new uses for run down areas of the city and I think Bilbao obviously is relevant to Dubai in that. I'm not sure, perhaps the panel can tell me what has really happened in terms of the cultural scene underneath the Guggenheim, and whether it has actually spawned all the activity that we have been talking about on the panel. I think it is something that we'd all like to see in the future here, but how effective has that been in Bilbao?

### Maria Finders

Does anybody know about what happened in Bilbao after the museum was built? I think people come to Bilbao just to go to the museum.

I mean, it didn't really develop a local art scene because they had...

### Audience

All the people that I know just went there to visit the museum. Maybe we slept in the city but clearly we didn't feel that the city was really involved in the museum. So you weren't visiting local galleries or discovering local artists. But they were quite an advanced part of Spain. You cannot just say it was a new town with little history, and we had people like Chillida living next door, which had a studio and many artists. And Bilbao also has a very good museum, which was overshadowed by Guggenheim, so I would say that we go there as tourists but I live in a different

part of Spain. Bilbao had an impact on the whole scene in Spain actually so we cannot say that it did not have an impact on the cultural environment in its totality.

#### Audience

I'm based in Barcelona and I'm not overly familiar with Bilbao, but one thing I did ask when I was recently there was the kind of make up of the staff. In fact it's interesting to know that there is no resident curator at Bilbao, because all the exhibitions are actually curated from New York, and I think that's very indicative of the situation. It's sort of again this thing of buying art, bringing exhibitions in and you know, in fact going round the museums. They are collecting Spanish and Basque artists, but there is very little evidence of that in terms of the exhibition programme and in terms of an art scene throughout the city and around. It doesn't seem to have had much of a ripple effect, so perhaps that's something we all need to be wary of.

#### Audience

I disagree about that in terms of the value of what Bilbao is doing because they really are acquiring a great collection of contemporary Spanish art, and I think that the relation with the institute in New York will work even more to build a real sort of bridge because you know at some point there will be a great exhibition in New York of contemporary Spanish art and that's very valuable. I'm very familiar with the global art scene, but I have to say that I am not particularly aware of what's going on in that place and in terms of diversity of artists and really learning about different places and different things that are going on. You know these kinds of alliances will in the end build their bridge, and we talk about time and it does take time, but I think no one can deny that Bilbao has really been transformed into a destination. I think that most of us here have probably been there and that's something to say because I know that as I travel to the various art fairs and the various great museums in the world, I have never been to Bilbao before and now that there is going to be this big building and this landmark there, I think the city of Bilbao is very grateful for what the museum has brought, not in terms of just an economic impact but also in a lasting cultural

kind of success.

#### Maria Finders

If you guys want to answer those questions, we don't have lights but we can still see you...

#### Audience

I have a question about the title if anybody from the panel can tell me, what do you mean by "branding cities through culture?" How do you brand cities with culture? What are the criteria that you use? Perhaps you should start by deciding on an understanding of what culture is. How do you define culture so that we can start from the beginning or the bottom wherever you want to call it?

#### Donna De Salvo

I agree with you. I think this issue about what is culture. I don't think there's a universal agreement on it and in listening to everyone speak I just started to think you've been talking about the notion of the world museum, a place like the Metropolitan, or the Louvre, and we're also assuming that maybe there's one kind of museum. I think for a museum to lose its specificity as a place would be a very sad thing.

When we talk about the role of the individual artist, I mean to talk about individuals in a world, is already a daunting concept so I don't think we are going to come to a conclusion.

I don't know what branding a city through culture means. As you said, Dubai has been branded and it needs to be re-branded. It's a contemporary term. It's a term of a late capitalist world in a certain way and so we all talked about it using historical examples, which are in another moment but I think we should not be losing sight of the specifics of a place. So maybe these are regional realities. The Whitney is a funny place because it's a museum of American art, and we get frequently attacked by people who say we are not American enough and others who say we've become international and we've sold out. So you cannot be all things to all people; it's just impossible. Maybe one begins by starting from the place or the person. The

individual and works outward from that, I think it's important if you are in a museum situation to hold onto that, that museums do something very specific. Each of us has a role. Culture sort of exists and thrives and goes on and starts and stops and luckily some of it goes on whether we're doing something or not. Maybe that has to do with sheer human will, so I think it's important not to lose sight of that very fundamental place. Otto, what you were saying about the role of Group Zero and artists, many artists who work collaboratively and who got fed up with museums who started their own galleries and spaces, that's been a real resurgence recently. I think it's a mistake to think we can brand something because branding is an advertising term and advertising is predicated on coming up with an image which everyone will understand quickly.

#### Jan Dalley

That was the deep answer; now I'll give you the shallow answer. I will give you a precise example of how places in the world try to use exactly the techniques of marketing and PR to re-brand their cities. Take the example at the National Gallery in London. At the moment there is an exhibition of Renoir landscapes, beautiful little show. A while back The National Gallery organised a press trip for journalists. Quite often they do that for us, very, very nice, for a China show, and off we go to China so we have some idea about what we're talking about when we come to write about it. But you will never guess where the press trip organised by a major London institution in advance of the Renoir landscapes was. Italy? China? No, it was Las Vegas. It is true, I absolutely promise you this press trip was going to Las Vegas. There is one picture in that show; it's a beautiful little Renoir of a garden in Algeria which has its home in Las Vegas. So the city of Las Vegas indeed has a particular institution that thought it would be a good idea to get a load of British journalists and fly them to Las Vegas to prepare for the Renoir show. We thought we knew about it, and it's just a lot of casinos and plastic and tacky. But you know what, they've also got Renoirs, so that is what I mean about how people try to re-brand themselves through culture. I feel very superficial here but maybe because I live in

a very superficial world of the press. I see this happening all the time. This is not a stupid title; this is a real question, and people are using the techniques of marketing and public relations to think about how their cities are perceived in the world because it's about the tourist industry. I think that the one thing we haven't really touched on, which is cultural tourism and which is so valuable now to the great destinations of the world. No wonder Bilbao is very happy to have the Guggenheim because it means it gets a huge number of tourist dollars. There are also lots of places in the world that want what they think of as slightly better type of tourist because cultural tourists are very nice and well behaved and spend a lot of money but don't demand too much and don't get drunk in the streets. I feel as though I've brought this discussion down to earth with a big bump but we can't pretend that it's not there, and we can't pretend that it's not effective. It is actually very effective.

#### Lisa Ball-Lechgar

I just want to say that this woman is speaking great words, seriously. From a planning point of view, I'm not turning art into a brown fizzy drink and getting Christina Aguilera to sing about Pepsi or Coca-Cola. I'm not talking about globalising art so it loses its regional and cultural and national identities. But what I am talking about is profiling, packaging, using marketing techniques and there is no Charles Landry here (who invented the creative cities concept), sitting here tonight who could tell you about this, but branding cities is about re-packaging the richness and diversity and wealth that is already there, speaking in different languages and different terminology to different audiences.

This weekend in Dubai Desert Rock is happening, Iron Maiden and the Prodigy are playing, and if you go into the desert near Dubai, there are thousands and thousands of young people. They're not here, and they don't know about what we are doing here. Also up the road to Dubai media city you have the Dubai Jazz Festival. Now commonly jazz lovers are also, in terms of demographics, also great lovers of art. They don't know that the Gulf Art Fair is happening. Okay? Or they have chosen not to

come here? So am I sitting here preaching to the converted? I think I probably am because we all believe in the power of culture and we all believe how if you sell culture, if you advocate culture, people will come. In Dubai the mantra is “Build it and they will come”, but it’s not going to work if there is no audience development strategy. You can put Zaha Hadid’s opera house in the middle of the lagoons but no one’s going to come to it if the people who are running it don’t know what they are doing. Also if the people who are coming to it don’t know what’s in it, and if it’s not embedded into the heart of society through joined up strategic thinking. I love art, I’m passionate, I used to be an actress, but my faith is in the potential of planning and arts management. Arts management does not exist in this part of the world, so we have to take from the commercial sector, these branding techniques and bring them into arts management.

#### **Maria Finders**

Yes, absolutely. Final comments from our speakers and then we can continue our discussions outside in the sun. Go ahead.

#### **Audience**

I just want to add one word that Algeria this year is the cultural city for the Middle East and I don’t think anyone knew about it.

#### **Donna De Salvo**

This year is going to be the year of culture in Algeria so hopefully next year at the art fair they will be invited as the next cultural city of the Middle East.

#### **Maria Finders**

Wonderful. Donna, final words?

#### **Donna De Salvo**

Well, I think one has to be pragmatic. I’m an arts administrator and curator so I certainly understand about marketing and audience and all of those, but I must say I think if we don’t understand each other and respect and defend each other’s position, you will never have the level of quality and integrity that one aspires to, trust me. At the Whitney we have some extraordinary projects that do not bring in the crowds but we still do them and

we know how to balance our program but you cannot really support the things that are in a way are really unsupportable. Then I think you’ve failed.

#### **Audience**

A last comment – I’m from Dubai and I came here because I heard about the Gulf Art and I’m shocked and surprised that I don’t see any familiar faces. We, young people who are passionate about art and design, are not here and I don’t see anyone that I know. I know how Dubai is all about the buildings and let’s get Guggenheim and we’ll know what culture is about, and we want to be international, but I always think about how the Guggenheim would affect me, as a person from here. I’d want to promote my culture, I’m proud of it, I’m proud of my traditions and I know that one day I will be part of the international arts society. I just want to tell everyone that there is hope here, and we are here and that there are people who actually try to get there. This is the conference about art in the Gulf but I don’t see anyone that I know or that knows about it. I graduated from a design school, all my design friends just do not know about this event and they don’t know how important this is or how relevant it is to be here. I was just frustrated and I had to say it.

#### **Maria Finders**

Absolutely.

#### **David Barrie**

I think I’ve said everything I wanted to say, thanks.

#### **Lisa Ball-Lechgar**

Just one point. I don’t know whether Roberto Lopardo is in the room but the American University of Dubai is opening an art school in September they are bringing together their visual departments, photography, visual communications, and internal design so the dream has come true. The first art school is opening up in Dubai.



### Jan Dalley

Well I've probably also brought the conversation down to earth quite enough, I just wanted to stress to really pick up your point I think that the existence of proper museum institutions as opposed to just the market is incredibly important for exactly the reason you said – that you have to support what is not currently particularly popular because you never know when it will be.

### Yolla Naujaim

Well living here with, I hope, two new projects for your new programme, I hope the Middle East will be involved, and for the Gulf Art Fair I don't know who is in charge of this, so maybe we will have the first platform created somewhere in the Middle East for the next year.

### Andrée Sfeir-Semler

We are a minority, art is understood and taken. We feel here as if we are everybody, art is actually something for 2% of society, even in the western world, but our aim is to remain, to leave traces on the sun – not in the sun – but on the rocks. So let's carry it on so that something from our culture, from our contemporary society today sociological, politically speaking will remain artistically. Let's think about how to proceed, everyone of its own, starting at school, going on in galleries and hopefully leaving the consecration and museums of course of this region and not only of imported things from elsewhere. Before I was invited to this panel, I didn't know what to brand meant but I am very happy now to have been told a bit more about what it means.

### Maria Finders

To Brand. Otto?

### Otto Piene

A conciliatory note how the ancient passed at the time when we started the night exhibitions. Alfred Schmela started his gallery. His gallery was about 3 x 4 square meters just slightly larger than Elis Clare's first gallery in Paris which was 3 x 3 meters and both of these galleries became very important generators of interest and excitement and much beautiful art. Because of Alfred Schmela's gallery Yves Klein came to Düsseldorf and visited me

in my studio. He took from my studio two of my paintings, which on the train he took to Iris Clert, the gallery in Paris. The client of Iris Clert visited her gallery and she showed him my paintings as a result this client bought one of the paintings. The client was Alfred Baar, so within a fairly short time a cycle was maybe closed or may be opened and all the factors but quite a few of the ones that have been mentioned and are represented here came into this fairly short story. That means that in a certain way the situation has not changed except it is bigger and I think we used to say everything is bigger in America. Now, I'm inclined to say everything is bigger in Dubai, and I think now is Dubai's turn to come out with stories like that and indeed play as much of an enormously inspiring as for instance the New York museums or the Paris museums have played in the evolution of the arts in the 20th century as well, thank you.

### Maria Finders

Ladies and gentlemen I'm sure you have hundreds of questions for the speakers. Please feel free to contact them while they are still around, but let's go into the sun. Its nice out there, have some drinks and eat something.

## Building future art cities

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2:30–3:15

Andreas Angelidakis, Architecture  
and Digital Design, Athens, GR.

Nadim Karam, Artist and Architect, Beirut, LB.  
Langlands & Bell, Architects and Designers,  
London, UK.

Maria Finders

This afternoon we are going to start with something very visual. It's about architecture and it's a series that we started this morning on cities and branding through culture. Today we have with us, Nadim Karam, an artist and architect from Lebanon. We also have Andreas Angelidakis, who I met in Munich a few weeks ago, and who is a real virtual architect and a designer from Greece. We have Langlands & Bell from the UK, who worked together and who are artists and also architects, and we had a big discussion about what that means. What is going to happen is the

the people present are going to show you a little bit of their work and then we're going to discuss a little bit about how cities are affected by architecture and how the presentation of art is affected by architecture as well as its design element. Nadim, why don't you start and tell us about you and your work?

**Nadim Karam**

Thank you, Maria. I think this presentation could also be a follow up to the branding one before noon. As you said, I am based in Beirut and have done projects around the world, for example a number of urban art projects and I will be showing some of the work. The main question that comes up is, "Can cities dream?" This is the first thing I wrote about in a recent book that I published called, 'Urban Toys' and I think the question came up a lot after 9/11 in New York. It's about the power that should be given to art in cities so that we consider and give a sense of place to the places where we live and around the buildings that are mushrooming around places like Dubai and getting destroyed in areas like Beirut. We need to generate culture, generate life and this is the sense of my projects about how you move in the city.

*Next slide:* I've been doing performances, which have been followed up by different type of sketches in order to create the setting, and you can see how this is for a place like Tokyo and there is a scenario, there is a story. I'm a storyteller trying to give stories to cities in order to be inspired by the city itself. The urban toys that I spoke about just visit different cities and travel around the world. They are a kind of visa for me to visit the world because I always have problems getting a visa, so I usually show my work and they say okay we know about you, we'll get you somewhere.

And now this project is called The Net Bridge. This is the Beirut Marina and these high rise buildings seem related here, so there was a competition to create the sea gate entrance to Beirut. They wanted a bridge that is three or four meters and the idea was that the piazza would continue itself into a bridge which is a weaving thing into the water and it's all about weaving because all the buildings around belong to different developers.

*Next:* So the net is shown in a sense that light comes through the bridge, so it was very important to have light and a continuation of the context and the specificity of the place becomes very important.

*Next:* The cylinder shape delineates the gate for the city of Beirut, a sea gate, and this shows some kind of assimilation between the space itself and the whole project. The Net Bridge is in fact made of five lanes that go into the other side of Beirut. Now that the construction has begun on one side, it happens by the seaside, so the problems that we have in the city centre there is Hezbollah and all tents that are on one side of the city square and the other side of city square, which is the marina side is not invaded by anybody, so construction is constantly postponed; it's always like that. Just last week they were asking for the drawings again because construction is beginning on the bridge and we don't know how the politics were. Politics shifts things, elections change all the projects. All these things are common things and we have to live with them.

The bridge has five lanes that could take us in the middle. You can shift to any of the lanes you want so there is this choice of movement. Each of the lanes can take you to the park or to the hotel area and there is one lane that is particularly for the disabled and there are two lanes that are overlapped to create a moment of fun when moving on the bridge. Then we have simulations of the bridge with the Great Wall that is made of several holes and there are two main girders that carry the bridge. The studies for this project were done with Arup in London. It's a steel bridge. We are still deciding on the colours, but it should generate some energy in this city. That's what's very important. That is where architecture becomes a sculpture, where there is a fusion between both in order to generate a certain new power or new dynamics in the city where the park itself could become the bridge.

Now, I will talk about another project that I have just realised in Melbourne, Australia, where we have this rail bridge, which is called the Sandwich Bridge. As you can see from the beginning

of it there is a cut; this used to be a rail bridge and the structure is a combination of two times 45 degrees because bridges could not turn at 90 degrees. But then after leaving original rail bridge for 15 years, it became derelict so a competition was held asking artists and architects to build up to three floors on the bridge and by adding layers to add opportunities to generate money to maintain it. They had five winners and when I came for a conference there, I said that you can't just build on this bridge just to generate money and cut the city into two. What you can do instead of generating direct money is to create a cultural event that brings tourists to the area, bringing money to the areas around the bridge. I thought it would be interesting that the memory of the rail bridge that was once used to bring migrants from the port directly into the city centre be contained in the new project. The Commonwealth Games began in 2006, the Queen was coming and nobody knew what to do with that bridge, so that's where the idea came to create something. I proposed the Travellers (sculptures) which were three floors high, rather than making the bridge on three floors and that it should become a pedestrian bridge. So what we did was for each zone was to hire a specialist professor of history there that knew the types and faces of migration into Melbourne that we would use as inspiration for the Travellers. As a result, we have for example the Melbourne Beauty for the gold rush; we have the Running Cup for the refugees; the Butterfly Girl for Asian and Middle East migration, and all are divided into zones that relate to the history of the city. And there were also some paintings that were generated from the whole thing. Three times a day; at breakfast, lunch and dinner the sculptures move on the bridge creating an animation around the piazza.

Here you have the organic shape which I have designed, I have done a different design which was refused by the aboriginal community because I called it Spiral Man, and the first question was why man? I said: "I don't know, what shall we call it then?" And we had all these meetings with them trying to draw with me the spiral which has an aboriginal name. The sculptures are nine metres high and they have a transparency for several reasons.

Firstly you see the other side of the city but also because it needs to be 70% transparent for structural reasons, so when it moves it generates movement within movement. The piece is really about multiculturalism, of so many diverse people that have reached here phases after phases. Because it is a pedestrian bridge as the sculptures are moving the people are moving beside them and three times each day it looks like a fashion show that takes twenty minutes to cross the bridge. The whole thing captures the light that is around, in that sense because it's stainless steel effect and just catches all the light around it.

Notting Hill Gate is a community project, so they've asked us to do one thing for several artists around one area. I thought it's better to move in different zones of the project and every time I do one project I meet with the community there, so they've asked me to visit the carnival which is very famous there. So, I created the carnival figures that should be on the buildings but we ended up doing this project which is the carnival elephant in Notting Hill Gate.

In Japan they wanted to create an identity for a public place and in that sense they asked me to create an identity around the whole block where I built hundreds of sculptures including the elephant that I used in several places. The original idea was to put the sculptures on poles, but we needed the elephant because it became a wind-breaker in an area that needed more shelter. In Japan another project took twenty years to do and it required the monks to accept us building it and its hundreds of sculptures that are spread around the water. It reminds me a little bit of what I have in the waters here in Fort Island, which took less than one month to realize because of the rush we had to do. So the difference of scale between Dubai and Japan is something we have to work with, and as the hundreds of sculptures were erected to celebrate art and religion in one area, that's why the monks had to have several conferences concerning this.

Here I end with one project that I'm working on for Dubai. It's still a vision but I will be presenting it in two months time. It's a cloud for Dubai that you will have on the top, and below

trees, a small park, a lake, pavilions and a small castle for private rent. The rest is public and the structure that takes us up the way and this cloud is being studied also with Arup engineering in London. We are working on the way it should work and I consider that whatever is given to the public realm is like giving a bouquet of flowers to the city. It remains important to try to see the specificity of the place, its context and memory and still creating a contemporary effect in order to offer something to the city. Thank you.

#### **Maria Finders**

Very interesting. Can you just explain what that cloud is about? How are you going to put a structure on there?

#### **Nadim Karam**

The structure seems to be quite easy to my astonishment because when we create the structure that goes up four hundred meters, you can link it through elevators and escalators. One of the most important things in this project is the environmental issue that we are working a lot on. But going up there is creating a sense of mediation, a sense of stopping in Dubai and to see what's happening all round the whole thing. In a way, we are creating a soul.

#### **Maria Finders**

So you're elevating the culture?

#### **Nadim Karam**

Trying to at least, in one way or another.

#### **Maria Finders**

Andreas, what about you? What are you up to?

#### **Andreas Angelidakis**

Coming here to Dubai I actually realised it is a lot like the internet. It's kind of messy and things are built very quickly and you turn your head around and there are more buildings set up, and it's a lot like this place which is very popular and it's called 'Second Life.' It's a new virtual world, where for the first time that the virtual world is successful in terms of popularity because second life has an economy and it has money. Everything you do

is paid for and you buy stuff, it's total anarchy in a way. I had actually gone in there and I was looking for my house but the place had changed so much I couldn't find it, so I was walking through people's property.

My house was this kind of white tube house. I found I've been working on this kind of virtual world for a long time and I discovered a few things that are interesting. People have very short attention spans on the internet because they are just used to clicking through windows, closing windows. You need to build something that stays in their minds and is visually different, which I guess is what they also do in Dubai in a way. They try to have buildings that are recognizable and describable. I had a lot of trouble with this house because everybody kept building right next to me and they kind of wanted to block me and my neighbour didn't like me so she put up this wall of forest. She didn't want to see my house so the internet is not really cyber space, it's like real life. You have the same problems working as an architect and even though I've been working for almost ten years on these internet things, this was the first year that I actually had a real commission from a German publishing house to do the building in Second Life.

This is called the Tube House and it's kind of inspired by this chair by Joe Colombo called the Tube Chair and its done with these repetitive tubes because on the internet you can really copy and paste things a lot, so I found myself working with these repetitive forms, and also you can fly which is very useful. Yes towards the sunset kind of. One major project going back a few years that I did on the internet was this artist retreat for this group of artists.

It was a kind of movement called Neen. It was founded by a Greek friend Miltos Manetas; he asked me to design this Neen world, a kind of artists' retreat, a private place for the artists of the group to hang out and spend some time and there were different spaces like forests and beaches and different houses to spend some time. All the artists of this movement were living in different countries like Japan and Holland and stuff, so this was really a place to meet

up. For example this blue thing that we saw before was this way thing which was the beach. It was an environment but I didn't want to design nature and buildings. I wanted to combine everything in one so that it was things that looked like, it was a blue wave, it was a cloud building again, I guess the cloud is a recurring thing here and this kind of KV thing. I was working with a lot of patterns because it seemed to be something that you could work quickly with on the internet, there was a forest which was the entrance; it was called Teleport Four. You went there clicked on trees and it took you to other places, and so these artists of the Neen movement, their main kind of work was with websites, so a kind of moving image with the main name and I told them that if I'm going to design your houses in here, I want to treat you as clients so we kind of played the game that I was the architect, which I am but, and they were sort of commissioning me to do it, I didn't want to just base everything on whatever, so it was a curious form of branding because I wanted to base each one of the studios or houses on their work.

So this was a rainbow house and it was a kind of transparent cube where this rainbow bounced off of it. There were really sketches, sketches for building. I made a house from an animated pattern with a little studio with a door that opened and more space to give parties or stuff, so at some point this new world stopped existing because the hosting ran out. I wanted to have a way to keep it somewhere as an object and as architects we always want to build stuff because building things is supposed to be kind of the main achievement. In this case I decided to print, because I found this technology called 3D printing, sterile photography and I printed all of the houses, as objects, as pieces but they all had to be monochrome so I had to change the pattern and make it kind of structural in one material. This gave me some ideas to move on with it and I made some furniture like an interior space. This pattern got transferred to lace. This was a small pavilion in Athens for a show, a museum it was, the pattern started making these shadows and it became a different thing.

This was a proposal for an art neighbourhood in Athens which is in the works. This is not going to be realised because I finally



switched buildings and I'm doing another one, but this idea of taking this internet pattern, this ex virtual building, and then kind of through the genealogy growing it into a real place. What was interesting for me is that it retains its qualities of internet architecture, that it is still a recognizable building, that it's easy to read, it's made for this short attention span but its also a real structure.

Then in Milan I was asked to do a book store and ticket booth for this space called Hangar Biccoca. It was the same pattern but this time in a functional space and in the same space as Hangar Biccoca, he asked me to design an exhibition for them, an exhibition of video works. The space is a kind of huge hanger that looks nothing like the internet, it's kind of a very rough, industrial space and they asked me to design this show of video works that are inspired by cinema so people like Pierre Huyghe with *The Third Memory* and I realized that to make a video show, a video exhibition inside this space I had to design two kinds of spaces; the space that is between the person and the projection and the space of the work and the space of the exhibition. So my first proposal to them was to make this kind of open cave that people can sit at the entrance and have a closed experience. It's kind of based on monitors and computer screens and the whole. These caves would be scattered in the space in a kind of random order so people can actually walk around them in an un-described way. Because I was interested in bringing this idea of the short attention span – and actually in Munich where I met Maria, there was this really interesting talk from this woman called Linda Stone – and she was talking about how nowadays, because we receive so much information and we kind of get our emails on the Blackberry and we are constantly receiving information, we are always in a kind of continuous partial attention, so we don't really pay any attention to anything totally but we pay attention to a lot of stuff at the same time. So in the video show you have this problem that people are kind of peeping into the room and then saying “oh, this is not interesting”, and then go out and so I wanted to keep the works present inside this space for a longer time and with these caves

that are open. The works are open to the space but people can choose how to browse the exhibition freely. It's kind of like surfing on the internet and it was looking kind of like this, and actually, the show is still on for a couple of weeks. It's called *Collateral*. Here I kind of cheated because I had to open some doors to let some light in so you could take some photos of the space as a structure but the idea is that this becomes almost like a city of monitors. These monitors are enlarged to the scale of buildings, that's another view. I was happy because this idea of people really stayed a long time in the show and because they could see the works from far away and they could even sometimes see two works at the same time or look at them from far away, it worked as a space, you can see the scale of the thing, it's kind of big.

I have tried to move the ideas – virtual space – that came from the internet always forward to bigger structures, because for me there is no difference between real or virtual working process, I guess, from one to the other. *Can we have the DVD?* So this DVD is a short movie for a building that was based on this beach inside this Neen world, with blue waves, so this was again working in the same internet way of repeating a module like a pattern in this kind of copy/paste thing, but I wanted to create a building that kind of fuses the experiences of hotel with the experience of the beach, because the beach is a hotel, you put your towel and you decide where you are going to sit, and the idea of ‘squat’ because the internet is a lot like squatting you know, you choose a place and you occupy it for a while, and squatting is a kind of location you escape from society for a while so there was kind of activist decoration. This was for a competition for a hotel and of course its not 100% realistic. It's like 80% because its curves are probably hard to walk on, but as architects there is always a constant negotiation between the design and the realistic part and I think one has to really start off from something that is very, very ambitious and then as it gets closer to realization it retains some part of that ambition, so even if we design something that is not clearly usable, I think when it reaches the built phase it will have retained some of this poetry inside it.

A lot of times I'm described as a virtual architect so in this tradition just designed even like how the windows open, the stairs are a bit tricky but of course in the animation there is no gravity so it's okay. In a strange way I thought this building was like these patterns are almost Arabic in a way, I just realised this when I came here. It was kind of Dubai referenced by accident. The idea of the beach is that these corridors and the public spaces in the hotel are so big, so they could be occupied at some point; there is a lot of empty space around, which I think is important in locations.

**Maria Finders**

But it's very communal. It's like everyone lives on top of everybody else. It doesn't look like there's a lot of private space.

**Andreas Angelidakis**

No there are rooms. It's really structured like a proper hotel, but there is this communal effect. It was also a bit inspired by this kind of hippie commune idea.

**Maria Finders**

Yes, exactly. It looks like a virtual hippie commune where everyone lives together.

**Andreas Angelidakis**

Yes.

**Maria Finders**

But there is no bathroom.

**Andreas Angelidakis**

Oh no there is, if we go to the room right here, the furniture is almost like beach accessories, I was trying to get everything to fit in on this curved thing. Here is the bathroom, fully equipped with a Jacuzzi. It's not hippie at all.

**Maria Finders**

It's "bobo"...

**Andreas Angelidakis**

Yes it could be.

**Maria Finders**

So could this translate also into an exhibition space?

**Andreas Angelidakis**

I don't know. It depends on the exhibition I think. In exhibitions you almost have to strike a balance between how much the space of the exhibition is recognizable and how much you affect the art works. For example, in *Collateral* I spoke with all the artists and they agreed to use their works in this way.

**Maria Finders**

Because the structure is the work?

**Andreas Angelidakis**

Yes.

**Maria Finders**

It really affects the way that you see that kind of video. It completely defines it by size and shape, if it's square.

**Andreas Angelidakis**

No, no we kept all the proportions of the work. In each cave it was different. It was made to measure for each work, but of course these caves defined, gave a look to the whole exhibition and some artists had complicated works that needed some doors and stuff, but when they came to the space they said, "Oh, let's do away with installation and just project it simply because it fits better", so it was really collaboration. So in the design of a show you really have to work with the work.

**Maria Finders**

I think that's a good way to introduce Langlands & Bell and ask them what it really means to work with those spaces and let's see what you're up to.

**Langlands & Bell**

Well my name is Ben Langlands and this is Nikki Bell and we've been working together since 1978, and since that time all the work that we've done has been the product of our collaboration.

Our work is primarily focused on a kind of poetic exploration of the language of architecture. We see architecture as probably the

most tangible record of our existence as people and we see it as a very concrete evidence of the way we relate to each other, kind of concrete evidence of our consciousness. So our work has been a journey through in some ways an archaeology in the present of our surroundings and we're looking here at some works that we actually made in the 1990s which was a series which we called 'Logo Works'.

It started when we did an exhibition in Frankfurt. We noticed at that time Frankfurt seemed to us suddenly as Europe's logo city, and we noticed all these high rise multi-national headquarters in the city centre, and we realised that the plans actually represented logos, not necessarily the logo of the company, although in one or two instances they are actually the logo of the company, but just the kind of design thinking of the architects that build these buildings and the people who commission them seemed to me to be extremely logo-centric so we made these relief sculptures, which are all about a metre square. They are all the same size. This is Deutsche Bank, for example, and this is Unilever in Hamburg, and this is Rank Xerox in Düsseldorf, and this is IBM in Stuttgart.

#### **Nikki Bell**

We like to actually work with real buildings. We're not interested in fiction really. We are interested in reality and these are the actual plans of the real buildings.

#### **Ben Langlands**

We were very interested in the way that these companies were so focused on the design strategy and that the idea of the logo runs all the way through the company from the letterhead on their notepaper right to their headquarters building, which becomes a kind of a super logo in the city. It projects the image of the company over the city and of course people who visit the company will become imprinted by the building and the employees and everybody will identify with the company very powerfully. On that way for instance the Deutsche Bank nicknamed each of these towers which are named Credit and Debit, and the plans often have a little allegory going. The Unilever,

the red one, is of course three levers turning round in central hall, and this one of the IBM headquarters in Stuttgart seems to resemble micro circuitry, so there is actually the BMW headquarters which doesn't seem to be coming up, but anyway, that seems to resemble an engineering drawing, a section through a cylinder head or a wheeled vehicle, so it's quite incredible the way that companies sublimely project itself on this strategy, so as I said in some ways these buildings are actually codes for the aspirations of the company in terms of their business and their public image, and we've maintained this interest in codes throughout our work.

As Nikki said we tend to work, we always work with references which are nonfiction, so for a long time we've been interested in the motifs and iconography typologies deriving from the world of aviation, and the work we made on this theme exists in different forms: sculptures, computer animations, and there are printed work. This is the air routes of the world and you can see the geography of the world indicated just by the way the cities and the routes between them are displayed over the surface of the image.

One of the things we like about this is that it's very abstract, yes, it's very concrete, and it's about an actual reality. It's also of course another kind of architecture. It's more abstractive but it's a system of order which is relating reality to it. And it's representing relationships. It's a system that represents our relationship to each other. You can see the relationships between the cities, you can see the densest communications happen between the north eastern seaboard North America through Europe and Middle East and to Japan. You can see that the southern hemisphere is relatively empty. There are far less major cities and far less communication and activity between them, because these routes represent the access and movement of people and of goods and economic movements as well, so we found this a very interesting display that can be interpreted in different ways. We started making these works in the late 1980s but we've carried them on right up until now and this led us to look at the way cities are presented to us encoded and this global architecture in another way, when we started to look at the three

letter codes which we get on our luggage labels whenever we travel through airports.

#### **Nikki Bell**

I think as the world gets more complicated and we have more need to identify elements and events, and these are the codes of airports world wide and as we all travel more and as time collapses, we identify more with these codes.

#### **Ben Langlands**

A lot of them are very familiar. I should say first of all that this screen resolution is not doing it justice so actually the image is spilling beyond the frame of the screen. It is actually a circular layout of these three letter codes and what we are looking at here is an animation of a short digital film or actually a selection of six little digital films, which are packaged together and which play randomly, but as Nikki says, we become more and more familiar with these codes for the different cities and in our minds we join them up. Each of us have our own associations for the connections between them and we are familiar and we can work them out you know – Dakar, Basel, Madrid – and some of them are so familiar that we use only the code rather than the city name. I mean if you are in New York and you get into a taxi and you say take me to JFK, the driver knows exactly where you want to go.

#### **Maria Finders**

If you are in LA, you might say take me to LAX?

#### **Ben Langlands**

Yes. These very abbreviated forms that become very functional. They are like distillations of these very complex realities, and as Nikki was saying, as life gets more and more complicated and there are more and more systems and grids which are overlapping and interacting we have a greater and greater need for these codes to identify elements and events, and in time of course the codes become a language. Again, they are very abstract but they are also very actual. They are completely non fiction. There's no fantasy really. It's more a question of how we use them and how we relate to them and how we connect them up. So this encourages us to look at codes in lots of different areas of our lives.

We've made works using lots of different codes. We recently travelled to Afghanistan and made a work on return from Afghanistan which used the codes of the NGOs the disaster and relief agencies which are based in Afghanistan, because we realised that the codes were indicating a global network which nominally or objectively of course is about global efforts of reconstruction and disaster relief and the management of disaster. But at the same time, we realised they reflected a global network of power and access and global economics in Afghanistan. The codes like UNHCR, which is the UN council for refugees or the absurd ones like WIN which is "World In Need" or COW which is "Children of War". There are hundreds of them and we made animations using them and we realised that a lot of the codes were for organisations based in Western countries, and so it reflected another kind of global, economic and political reality and the way it touched on the situation in Afghanistan.

These I expect you probably recognize. Unfortunately, again, the screen resolution is not correctly adjusted here, so we can't see the full screen but what we are looking at are the codes that identify art museums around the world, and nowadays every city wants an art museum. But not only that, I am speaking slightly glibly of course, but if we go along with that idea for a moment, not only do they want an art museum, but they also want it to be abbreviated into a form that's instantaneously recognizable and familiar. The archetype for this original one is MoMA in New York, but now every city wants one. This is the Philadelphia ICA, MACRO is in Rome, the museum of contemporary art in Rome, and PS1 we also know in New York. There's MOACK the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art, so they are all over the world.

#### **Nikki Bell**

This is a work called A Museum.

#### **Ben Langlands**

Yes the title of this work is A Museum, which is also a code. The previous work – the black and white animation of the destination codes – is called 'Frozen Sky' and those are actually codes for

destinations, FRO being the code for Flora in Norway, ZMB being the destination code for Zeneg in Papp New Guinea and SKY being the code for Sunduski in Ohio in the USA.

**Nikki Bell**

I think it's interesting to think that today more people visit museums than football matches, for instance.

**Maria Finders**

Is that true, mathematically true?

**Nikki Bell**

Yes absolutely, and Tate Modern is now the biggest visitor attraction in Britain, for instance, so museums and culture identity has taken on a real significance now.

**Ben Langlands**

Yes. In fact seven out of the top ten visitor attractions, which is the PR word for what these attractions that attract large numbers of preferably paying people, in the UK are all museums, so as Nikki said the top one is Tate Modern, which is quite something in London because ten years ago this would be completely unthinkable and certainly twenty years ago there was a very conservative relationship in British cultural life with contemporary and modern art. And Tate Modern, through building the new building, and various other things, has been projected into the first position in the culture of the nation and in London, so it's quite a staggering change of circumstances.

**Nikki Bell**

And here actually in Dubai you have the Burg Dubai, which is currently under construction and in 2008 it will be complete and it's going to be the tallest structure in the world.

**Ben Langlands**

Yes. Again it's showing the importance of buildings which are for branding and identifying cities.

**Maria Finders**

So size matters?

**Ben Langlands**

Size matters.

**Maria Finders**

When we are talking about architecture, absolutely.

**Nikki Bell**

I think the world is becoming more competitive and architecture is competing globally.

**Maria Finders**

I think we have just time for one round of questions, unfortunately, because these are amazing presentations. It was funny because Otto Piene was telling us the other day that what we can see from the sky is usually the architecture and not the art, and obviously these kind of symbols are so global in the way that we see them. It is like thinking about JFK. MoMA is the same thing as JFK, so when we come down to brands, the question I have is who is going to be identifying these places and making these things stick because you're all kind of artists being architects or architects being artists in a way. There are very few boundaries between architecture and art right now. And in the real world I've often wondered about other architects. Are they the ones that want to sign off on this new reality of museums or should it be the city's council signing off on that reality? Who's going to be the one to determine what's going to be the really landmark museums? Should it be the architect? Should it be the city or should it be the artists whose work is going to be hosted, what have they got to say about that?

**Nikki Bell**

I don't think that an artist has designed a museum yet, so I think that's for the future.

**Maria Finders**

I think that some artists have actually. I know Ai Wei Wei has designed a museum, I mean, not in the Western world but in the Far East. I think artists are very involved in the architecture process. I don't know if their work will be shown in those museums though.



### Nadim Karam

I think it should be a collaborative process between the city and the artist and the architects, but I thought what was interesting in your presentation about these abbreviated forms is that a lot of times from architects the museums demand these kinds of abbreviations. They demand that the design becomes an abbreviated form, like a logo, almost like Bilbao. I mean the new Tate is going to be more abbreviated with these kind of boxes stacked up like a design that's recognizable as a logo, and I think this is also related to architecture and urban design and museums. I know there are lots of talks of museums coming up in this part of the world, I mean in the Gulf area. In Beirut we have one National Museum and one museum of modern art and they might do an exhibition, one a year. They don't have a contemporary museum. There are lots of talks about contemporary museum here but there is also the issue of what role the city itself could play as a kind of museum. Within a city there are lots of streets, and piazzas and public spaces that could be used when you don't want to enter the doors of the museum to do your work. So there is also this possibility, that the public realm is the museum somehow, a museum in the sense that it's a place where you walk, where it's for the whole public to realize to appreciate, to create a sense of place of it and to accept and work with.

### Maria Finders

That's an interesting concept.

### Nikki Bell

Yes, I think that the English arts organization, Art Angel, is one well known example of that as a commissioning agency. They've done a lot of innovative large scale commissions in the public realm in the UK which have been, some of them very challenging and very successful projects.

### Maria Finders

I guess it's also about the city being itself a living museum and the cohesion of these structures because when we walk around Dubai, what I really noticed is, I didn't see any people, I saw amazing buildings but...

### Ben Langlands

Maybe it would be interesting that in Dubai they do one of these exhibitions that engage the city like the Berlin Biennial, where the exhibitions kind of engage the city, and it could be an interesting experiment to do something like this in Dubai because we kind of come here and go to the hotel and we go to the conference. We never really see Dubai, so it could be interesting.

### Maria Finders

In Dubai people tend to be in their cars a lot, going between places.

### Nikki Bell

This could be a drive-by exhibition.

### Maria Finders

A drive-by. On this note we end our panel – thank you very much.

## Post-panel short presentation

Maria Finders

Okay, now we are going to do our final panel of today, which is going to be a lot of different city focuses. We have a group of speakers this afternoon that have specific experiences with specific cities although they are all very international people. Just one short note, this gentleman here brought me a catalogue a little while ago, and he's from Doha and I just want him to, just for two minutes before we start our panel, tell us what he talked to me about because we didn't have enough local speakers. So when he told me about their project in their museum I thought it was very interesting. Nadim, why don't you start to tell us about you your work?

Audience

Well thank you very much for the opportunity. Well actually I live in Doha, in Qatar, where I work as a gallery director for the Virginia Commonwealth University, where we have an active exhibition programme and we bring in artists from outside. We bring

in artists from the region. I have just curated an exhibition that I have created with a colleague about the Bauhaus interior. Most of our exhibitions have to be seen in the setting of an academic institution. We are a design school. We have three design programmes and so our exhibitions should stimulate our students but also the community, and we have, I have seen in the last two years, or as I have been actively working as director of the gallery, the rise really in the numbers of people attending openings and people coming to exhibitions. I'm also organising a lecture series on the arts and architecture of the Islamic world, which is my area of academic expertise and I have seen an incredible rise in the numbers, but that is because I go to the people. I talk to them. I work very hard on getting people to come to us, and I think what came up in the discussion earlier on, is that we are actually not very well connected in this region. I mean we are not very well connected in our own cities. In fact, if I think about Doha there are so many things that have happened that I don't actually know about and the important thing is, and that I think what should come out of this occasion, is that we in the region should really work together. And Dubai as a city is within the microcosm of the Gulf. There are many things happening in this whole region that are related to each other and that should be seen within this context – what's happening right now, politically, economically – and I think that is really important. Dubai isn't the kind of star case. Dubai is a big city. People bring a lot of money in. Abu Dhabi is doing that now, Qatar is doing that, and in Kuwait we will see a museum coming up, but we need to work together. So that is my message, really, and thank you so much for giving me that opportunity.

Maria Finders

But you should show people your catalogue, it's fantastic.

Audience

I haven't any more copies left.

Maria Finders

I gave one to Design Miami; they loved it.

## Audience

If anybody would like to leave their cards with me I will put them on my mailing list and you will receive all the information about our event. Of course, Qatar is also building some museums and I can't talk about those, but I can talk about what we're doing in our school. We have a design conference every year; in fact, it was just this weekend, overlapping, so I escaped for a Thursday afternoon to take part in this.

## Art Cities Focus

### World art cities

03.15–4.30

**Beijing:** Lance Fung, Curator, art dealer, Artistic Director, SITE Santa Fe 2008, New York City, N.Y., USA. **Cairo:** William Wells, Director Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt. **UK:** Jerome Sans, Director of Programme, Baltic, Gateshead, UK. **New York:** Bob Monk, Director, Gagosian Gallery, New York City, N.Y., USA. **Seoul:** Kim Mi Kyung, Professor Kangnam University, head of the KARI Korean Modern and Contemporary Art Research Institute, Seoul, Korea. **Moderator** Maria Finders, Conference Curator, Director Europe, Brunswick Arts, Paris, FR.

Maria Finders

Moving along with our last panel, Lance Fung is coming to us today to tell us a little about Beijing and the way China is moving forward. Jerome Sans, based in Paris, will contribute a couple of things about Paris. William Wells from Cairo will be telling us about the scene in Cairo. Replacing Savita Apte, who was

going to talk about Mumbai but who is ill, is Kim Mi Kyung, who is the head of the Korean Modern and Contemporary Art Research and she will tell us about Seoul, Korea, And we are also delighted to welcome Bob Monk, Director of Gagosian Gallery, who works for an art gallery as a curator, will tell us a little about New York.

I don't think we are going to specifically talk about cities. However, since many of you are very familiar with these cities and what they are doing art wise, it's interesting to get this global view of different scenes and of different perspectives. A lot of you even work together and this is a kind of global network. We are going to start with William.

#### William Wells

First of all, I really did think we were going to be talking under the title of Cultural Cities and over the last few days I've been listening to people talk about the needs and what makes a cultural city, the definition of a cultural city. Interestingly enough, I chose this picture which was taken a couple of years ago by Hala Elkoussy of the Tulun Mosque, overlooking the city. It is a landscape of what people come in to when they arrive in Cairo. I chose it because I know that most of the people here have seen the work of Laura Baladi, which is placed in front of the gatehouse right now. It's a state of the art Kaleidoscope and people might get the assumption that she worked collaboratively with the architect to make such a piece and that Cairo might in fact have something to do with Dubai.

In fact we have absolutely nothing in common with Dubai at all. For a start, there are probably twenty million people walking around the streets of Cairo every single day. The official figure is seventeen but let's look at twenty. The buildings that you've been looking at in Dubai are not the buildings you are looking at in that picture. It's a crowded, incredibly dense city and what also makes it different in terms of the art scene and culture is that we don't really want a Gulf Art Fair. We don't want a fair; we don't really need a fair. We already have a Biennale. We've had a Biennale for years and it's a dinosaur that tends to represent the

relatives of the people who work in the various governments around the regions. Certainly it's a good example of what has been taking place up until recently. But what makes Cairo so different from a lot of the discussions that have taken place are the issues of the artists. I have been in Cairo twenty years, but in the last ten years the initiative has actually come from the artists and I've heard people talk about historical things, have been happening.

In European cities, where the artists themselves actually generated an independent scene, that is what has happened in Cairo today, and you don't see it anywhere else.

We're talking about concentrating on education, production, concentration on the nobility of that art and concentrating on people working together, creating an independent scene that has nothing to do with the formal, official ministry. We have absolutely no support, financial economic support. We don't have the resources that you have here, so it's on the ground scene that that has built itself up into something unique from institutions around the Middle East and Africa, North Africa particularly.

Cairo stands out as being a city where the artists have mobilized themselves into some sort of a common identity. We have something called the Arts Council Egypt, and it originally started about a year and a half ago, consisting of individual institutions. Town House is one of them. There are some studios, the Contemporary Image Collective of the Makan, the Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum; these were the initial groups. In the film industry these are very young institutions. They have come together and realised that they can work together, share resources and have a common platform and a belief that the institutions need education. The artists need education, they need to access information so that all institutions have libraries, archives, workshops. It's not just sharing resources, we have residency programmes. If a resident comes to Town House we will send him over to other institutions for other audiences to build up, this body of information. It's far more important for us,

this sharing of information between individuals, than to have a large art fair or even a grand event that brings individuals like you together at one particular time. In reality most of you have probably already visited Cairo, or you certainly will visit Cairo. Whether it's to go down the Nile or to see the pyramids one day, you are certainly going to come down to see the Town House gallery. I'm absolutely certain of it! I'm that confident about it, because there are things happening there. Not only do you have this infrastructure that has been created by the artists and activists. We have been working against several obstacles and those obstacles happen to be an official art world that doesn't recognise the work that is being produced on the independent scene, and that's a huge problem. The work of the artists that I work with, I mean a lot of them we can't send our posters, our invitations into art colleges. We are not allowed to do that. We are not allowed to post them up into a lot of public institutions because the work that is being produced tends to question. It tends to raise social issues particularly in terms of how Egypt is represented. Images like this aren't necessarily popular in Egypt.

I think if you turned on your television set you would find the pyramids and the Red Sea and the tombs of Karnak. In reality, for the majority of the seventeen to twenty million people who live in Egypt, that is not really part of their life at all. It is not necessarily how they even want to be represented. Certainly in the lane that I work in, of car makers, welders, carpenters, these people haven't even been to the pyramids until they started meeting artists working in the streets with them and that made them take an interest in their history. So there is all this going on at one point.

With the Arts Council, we held a meeting about a month and a half ago to see whether other private institutions were interested in joining us and it was amazing – nearly seventy five people turned up because new spaces are opening up all the time. I'm not talking about commercial spaces. We have an art market, we have buyers who are buying established artists' work, but we also have people now who are realizing that it's on the ground.

Establishing relationships between artists and institutions helps

build this links with education and focuses on getting information out there, working together is key and vital. At the meeting we had seventy five people including corporate people, foundations, artists, directors of the new spaces, and almost all of the spaces were non profitable, private institutions. The important thing isn't necessarily the market but the artists themselves and the needs of the artists to express what they want to express about the city.

You can move on to some slides, and these are slides just randomly chosen because most of the artists again, and it's only four or five, tend to use the city. The city is amazing; it's an urban space that is the most inspiring space that I've ever been in my entire life. Negotiating the streets of Cairo is an art experience alone. So while we were looking at the roofs of thousands of houses, let's say you go to one of those roofs. It could quite clearly be something that you might find, an older woman doing cottage industry on top of the roof. In fact, it's a construction; this is an actress that she's chosen. In the next picture is Ayman Ramadan, the security guard in the gallery. He was working in the lane and his work was primarily dealing with cleaning the gallery, and at this point he realised that the relationships between what the artist was producing in the street and the street that he was living in, had many things in common. There was a theatrical element about it, the events, the rituals. They were taking place in the streets, they resounded very well with the notions of what the people were talking about in the gallery itself, so he took the Iftar breakfast and he looked at the last supper and he put the two together and I'm sure you all know what the entire breakfast is. This is the annexe space and it's interesting as well. Marianne Rinderknecht and Basim Magdy who actually did a collaborative work where they looked at the images from the video, the violence that is generated through video games and its relationships to what's going on in the entire world.

This is one of the most popular public beaches in Alexandria, where thousands of people swim every day, but this massive bridge has been built right across the beach and this is part of the domestic tourism series, which is a play if you like on the way the



government actually treat people. We're looking at power relationships here, one channel has the falcon and the eagle and the other has the *Dodgram*. It's the name of the piece, the *Dodgram*, those are the two icons that seem to symbolize what changes in the power systems that are taking place in the region.

And the final picture is coming up and that is just one of the spaces in the gallery. We have five buildings. They're old buildings, they've been closed for like thirty, forty maybe fifty years and we've got, as I say five of them, two factories, an old nineteenth century building housing residencies. We do work programmes working with street children, the refugee community in the area. Everything is primarily based on education, information and opportunity and I think I will just cut it there.

#### Maria Finders

Thank you very much William. I thought we were going to talk about the power struggle between New York and Paris. Lance, I don't know what you should talk about. Santa Fe is already a very important capital for artists as we were saying yesterday. You're also going to be working on a project in Beijing for the Olympics, so it's your call, you can talk a little bit on both.

#### Lance Fung

I'm actually speechless because I'm with such a great panel, when I hear what they all have to say. I've already lost what I was going to say. I think I'll focus on Beijing just because it relates so well to what William was talking about. We had a nice long lunch going over different ideas of what he's working on in Cairo, and many similar issues I think exist in Beijing.

They've asked me to do the first exhibition of public art in the history of China. You are not allowed to put anything in the public realm in China, unless it's a statue of Mao. So how do you go and do a contemporary art show that speaks on an international educated level where international critics will come in and critique my work, if there are so many boundaries in terms of social issues, economic issues, political issues, sexual issues and so on, that are taboo there. This concerns not only the museum

spaces, but also the commercial galleries and certainly in public spaces. Then again they asked me to do this project, and they also know that with the track record of the Snow Show as it had mainstream accessibility, which is something that's really important to me and all of all these people here to. They asked me to do a show for my "audience", so to speak, but to also speak to a wider range of people and have some sort of educational legacy. So the way I went forward was just ignoring all of the taboos and the boundaries, which is the way most of the Chinese artists of any quality have done and present this topic in a "moralistic" and suggestive ways. The other thing is how you address the issue of China and of Beijing. I cannot get an email from a friend every five minutes of the latest New York Times article on the burgeoning art scene in China and this painting just sold for umpteen millions of dollars etc, when work isn't any good. So how do you create a show when half of the artists are Chinese, but what they are doing is making a product? And how do you do that when you lecture to the students and they don't give a damn, they don't want to research, they're not intellectually rigorous and they have no interest in historical art context or content with their work?

Now of course there is the first generation of Chinese artists that did get out, like Jin Chang. He is a good friend who was working in a really interesting time period because there was political pressure. There were very few topics, which an artist could create the work on which is really reductive for an artist. So they figured out other ways to work and many stayed and many left. The famous ones have now since returned because now they're treated like heroes. So there are a lot of obstacles working in a new environment and one that's so rich with money, right.

When you come to Dubai, one topic is obviously the wealth that's here, as it can be such a great facilitator for the creative field but it can also be the worst impediment. In China, and of course this is a very generic approach of the assessment of Beijing, because there are talented artists, there are artists who are intellectual and artists dealing in an architecture context. But the mass of art that's being made there in the different huge gallery districts like

798 (Gallery district in Beijing), which is full of international galleries now, is really very product driven. I mean there are collectors who ask which Chinese artist they should get, and how Chinese art is still affordable, and then all of a sudden Chinese is fashionable. Every collector now needs a Chinese artist. I mean, what a wonderful thing to be reduced to? While collecting a good artist seems clear, there is not real need to start collecting Chinese artists right now just for the sake that they are Chinese and at whatever the cost. So I have those sorts of issues.

The main thing that happens surprisingly, and I'm still waiting for my show to get banned like the day before it opens, but since they're giving millions of dollars towards it, is that the money can be used in an effective way rather than just branding a city through a very generic type of exhibition. This is recognizing what China does and really has to offer and not in a very oriental sort of exportation of style.

Another interesting point is that every city in China is based on Feng Shui. They all have a central axis line that goes from South to North and since Beijing was an Imperial City, it is rich with historical content, and there are more national relics and world heritage sites on that centre line than throughout China. When I went to the minister of culture and the President of the Olympics and I said that this will be my site and we're going to do art and it's going to be spooky and it's going to be things that you don't understand, and it's going to be accessible and it's going to be free because again you have a great disparity of wealth here. I suppose the statistics are there. There is a millionaire made every ten minutes in China, just as they are going to build a thousand new museums by the year 2008. But there is a bit lapse when you do something so rapidly and I would really like to start my project not only with arts education on an artistic level but on a mainstream level. And also contemporary art doesn't have to be scary, it doesn't have to be overly political, and it doesn't have to be evasive. There is a balance that can be met and I think that when you have that combination then you do have government, you do have private individuals, you do have the naysayer's and of course you do have your art world behind it because there is an entry point for everybody.

My location now is happily the central access line of Beijing; which is also known as the Golden Dragon and it obviously goes from South to North including two of the original gates that once surrounded the city Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, Heavenly Temple, Bell & Drum Tower, and as the Chinese are quite strategic in everything they do, they continued that northern access line to expand the city and that's where the Olympic village will be and it will terminate at a new super expensive park which they plan to do. Public architecture and art.

What I decided to do is to bring a western historical context as far as contemporary art is concerned to China. I therefore invited five artists who I felt really made a major contribution to the art world including leading Chinese artist Cho Hay Chang, who was also invited to develop the opening ceremonies for the Beijing Olympic games.

*Next:* Laurie Anderson, who of course we know. Of course all of these people continue to make major contributions and she is of course a very important pioneering feminist performance artist dealing with sound, and so she will for the first time partner with her husband Lou Reed to create a performance opera, which will be a sort of fusion of Asian opera and classical Chinese opera and western opera at the Heavenly Temple.

The next piece is by Robert Berry, one of the seminal artists from the conceptual movement, doing a text piece around the Forbidden City, which is quite forbidden. It is, therefore, amazing that the government is so willing to take this experiment with contemporary art in such an obvious way during the Olympics in which millions of Chinese will go, let alone all the TV coverage internationally.

We have Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Of course their involvement in pioneering of installation art is quite important and they are planning on doing a very interactive piece with the local children of China because there isn't any arts education in China, because either you're wealthy and you're educated to run a business or you're kind of working in a factory. Here we have Jaume Plensa,

obviously quite important for public art is this most recent piece in Chicago in the Millennium Square with that incredible fountain of twenty million dollars which has become a wonderful icon and a meeting place for the city. So here Jaume is working on a wishing well in the middle of Tiananmen Square larger than the Mao object that's nearby, so it might be a little downsized but we are not quite sure. The nice thing too, of course, is that this issue of philanthropy and giving, as there are no tax incentives in China for this kind of thing. In addition to the five solo works that will give the project a little bit of an introduction to western history, I'm doing some work to this notion that I did, ten emerging or should I say ten unknown Chinese artists, each partnered with a different artist from a different country, so that there can be actual information exchange. Naturally the Chinese can create anything with the utmost of skill and ease and like that, but in order to bring in the topic of content and personal expression into the work, one must remember that the history of copying a master is of the highest value. That's what you learn in school there: classical scroll painting, calligraphy. It's not as if you're going to invent a new calligraphy technique so they have their cultural practice of education but they're so immediately thrust into the international world, people are buying work for a lot of money, museums are starting to show the work. I feel curators here may disagree, but there is a need to address international issues if they are going to join into the international forum. In any event, there are ten artists from different countries that will be partnered with ten Chinese artists, and they will have a year to dialogue, email, trips, picking up at different locations and so on the central access line.

This type of public art show has been done for decades. It's nothing new and I always remember that I'm humble when I meet with the Chinese people, thinking it's really not that new or fresh but when you actually sit down with them, some journalists when I first arrived here said if you just do half of the show, you will still be doing something for the country. And I still don't realize it because it's just art in a public space with different issues of different poignancy, but to put art in this situation and in

Beijing I guess is quite important. So that's how personally I'm trying to balance between issues that might be topical or really interesting for people outside of Beijing, because the information that goes in there is unbelievably edited; nearly all my emails are read before they are sent and received for sure and my phones are tapped. But I write everything I would normally say anyway. I can't edit myself. I'm not good at that. They'll edit it for me, but the point is to put it all out there and let that open discourse take place. I think that this is hopefully the value of this project.

Of course every step of the creative process by the teams will be interviewed by me, who will then work with my co-curator who is the Director of the National Museum in Beijing, and then of course the Director of the Minister of Culture will review things too. This piece is by one of the most famous female artists, because women are really not invited, supported, respected to be artists in China so there was not one curator, collector or anyone recommend in arts. I always had to say: "What about a woman?" and then they may name one or two, but to me it seemed like a fairly safe piece and so we put it in the proposal and it went to the President of the country in fact. The President had seen this woman's work as something that's very anti-progress, anti-development and it's showing that their culture is degrading, disappearing and it's being replaced by modernism and I thought, oh, that's rather interesting. At the same token I thought that the Minister of Culture and the co-curator from the National Gallery didn't find it objectionable. So testing the boundaries I think is another thing that's rather interesting, for what all of us are doing. That's the scope of it; check the website, won't you.

### **Maria Finders**

Thanks Lance. Jerome, you've been based in Paris for most of your life, and you were co-responsible for one of the biggest and most important projects that we all remember, which is the Palais de Tokyo. I think the Palais de Tokyo was the counterpoint of Beaubourg as it was not the free for all and infotainment centre, but a very striking building with a very complex programme.

In fact the renovation of the Palais de Tokyo was actually in partial destruction of the original building. It became the site of many important shows, especially of the show with M/M and the Dakis Ioannou Collection, which was a very landmark show in the way that exhibition space treats art. Paris is going through all the changes, and now you've even left Paris to live and work in the UK. So tell us a little about what's going on. What you think the future of contemporary art in Paris will be about?

### Jerome Sans

Well I come from a very famous country, France, where we are somehow very wealthy but are at the same point very lax in terms of contemporary culture. We are the big paradox: a country where every region, almost every city had a museum for so-called contemporary art, but these museums were living in another decade, two, three decades behind the rest of Europe, and there was no room for any different people, any different curator from the new generation. There was also no place for a new generation of artists, no place for a new generation of curator or critics or collector, so we had everything, but we had nothing. It was really strange; it was crazy, like having all the tools in your house and not knowing how to use them. So we decided that after waiting two decades to do it by ourselves. We were tired of waiting and nothing happening, since 1977 when the Pompidou Centre opened as this fantastic idea of a museum. But soon this first contemporary museum in the world became very traditional. We were tired of seeing that everybody was breathing, behaving, communicating and working in the same way, in a world where everybody plays a game of being creative. Why are we all the same? Why were we all looking the same? The only question people keep asking me is, "What is your next exhibition?" I am not interested in talking about any exhibitions, I'm interested by my differences, your differences, as we are human beings, and we are not generic. I'm working for human beings. What I am interested is difference: What we do, why we are here, what is the local activity, who are the people here? Are there any artists or film makers, writers, any individuals ready to play? We can't do anything by ourselves.

So, if we take the example of Paris, we had the chance when one day in 1998. Nicolas and me met in a bar together and decided, let's start working together we are two different individuals in our private way, we are different, we are not friends, never worked this way before but we are in a country where the art world is surprisingly divided in mini clubs and you can't jump from one to the other one. Either you are part of one or the other one, so we were tired of this limitation. Either you are generous in your life, either you share things, even with differences. The only thing to lose was to work with someone so different from myself. So we decided at the end of fifteen years of looking at each other that perhaps we should work together and try to build up for once a platform of an open dialogue and try to make a real collaboration of the 21st century and not of the 20th century. It was about inventing a new form of showing the art, a new form of welcoming people in the room, a new form of communicating the art, a new way of spending less money on stupidities like sending invitation cards. Why are we sending invitation cards at a time when we can send and make the same thing through the internet? We were the first art institution to work like in the music industry, asking questions like, why don't we spend all the money on producing shows to make programming or the system?

We were more than successful and what we were most interested in, and with some of our colleagues here was to see more and more, but more and more creativity issues. There was no need to have any more traditions. We know the artists, all our friends artists who are becoming successful nowadays are tired to be always in flight to reach the same tradition, everywhere from one place to another to be in this gypsy life. It sounds very sexy, very jet set but at the end it is very boring. It is super boring to be in the same situation with no experience, no extravaganza, no adventure.

Art is like life. It's a permanent experience and it has to be an adventure where you have to be shaken, where you have to be reinventing yourself from one day to the other.

We decided, Nicolas and myself, that when we initiated that place we should make a contract for a very short presence and not to make this our mission for the rest of our lives. We wanted to do it for the people but to also do something creative and to be generous. So we announced very early on, said it very loudly and proudly that after a four-year period, we would give it to someone else, and we were very happy to be part of the jury to find a next director, Marc-Olivier Wahler who is in place now. When these changes happen, it is normally the tradition that as you take over the job of another team you have no money in the project, and you have to wait at least two years to make your first project so you suffer a lot in the corner, trying little by little trying to understand what's going on. We decided to leave him sufficient funding, we introduced him to all the staff, we trained him a little while about the way things worked in a way sharing the kitchen, sharing the bedroom, sharing how to take a bath, explaining that it's really a house, not just the bank. And it is only after this that we left the house for him and said you can change everything: the walls, enlarge your bedroom and make the kitchen the way you want, here are the keys, situation we will be behind you, here is our cellular phone, call us whenever you want. So it was another way of working and I wish to meet more and more people like us people ready to make their own place. I believe in humans, I don't believe in things which have no soul. I am a little farmer and I love to have this human experience every day, which is the reason why I came here to meet all the people and maybe have a little experience here with some human beings. Thank you very much.

### **Maria Finders**

Thanks, Jerome. Bob, you had told me you wanted to do this with Donna, do you want me to call Donna up as well if you are going to be discussing New York? You come from a very important art dealing institution. The Gagosian Gallery that's always number 1, number 1, number 1 in the world. And within that "institution" you are curator, and you're in the biggest city in the world for art. How does that work? Where is that going to go? Is it going to get bigger or smaller or is it part of the world that William is talking about? What are the challenges now in New York?

### **Bob Monk**

Well I don't really know what the challenges are. I think the art world is expanding. I think it's a great thing for New York that artists who continue to exhibit in New York live in other places. I think many cities around the world are spawning incredibly young artists that will show in both the cities that they are living in and will also show in New York.

Just briefly to tell you how I found New York really interesting. I've lived in New York all of my life. I went to art school in New York, and at a very young age, I had an experience that was to spoil me for my life and that is to work for Leo Castelli. So even though I work in the commercial art world, I was taught by a very great man the value of the individual and more specifically, the individual as an artist.

It's incredible to work at a place like the Gagosian Gallery where the resources are plentiful for the exhibitions that we do. I'm very proud of the exhibitions that I do there and other people do and sometimes I have to say that I even wonder why the great museums are not doing those exhibitions but now having a lot of friends who are directors and curators I understand that the gears move much more slowly in the museum world, as I think they should. Museums are up against a lot of obstacles. As I said, I've lived in New York all my life. I walk to work and my children walk to school. It's an incredible city. New York still retains its vibrancy and there are younger artists coming along, but I think there's also a sort of tragic feeling in New York City, and it's happened in other large cities. Most young people really can't afford to live there, people make do, one of my children, my eldest son is now back from college and he may be an artist and he's saying that he would probably have to move to Queens. I don't think that's the end of the world but these sort of satellite neighbourhoods keep moving further and further away from what we all experience in New York, going to the Whitney, going soon to the New Museum which is going to be very exciting when that opens, but where is the art world going?



New York is a very scrappy city, I think that scrappy environment is really great for the creation, debate and appreciation of art made again by individual artists and I think New York will continue to be a very interesting and vital art town. But as I said the only thing I worry about – as I do in London and a few other cities – is where these young people and even middle aged people, older artists, people who have made art their own lives and maybe don't have a very successful commercial go at it. Where are these people going to live? More and more you just read about this investment banker buying a loft building in Soho, Chelsea or whatever, I understand that's the facts of life in the real estate market but it's very difficult. That's the only thing I really worry about.

As far as you and I were talking about other cities challenging New York, I think that's kind of wonderful. I do believe in the individual art, it might take me a little longer to understand or appreciate someone's art from a country that has a culture that is different from mine, but I think it's equal in its expressive power and in many cases its spiritual strength, so I think it's great that like Berlin where a lot of people are moving and places in Asia where people are moving and settling and so. Anyway I hope I've answered your question. But I think New York has a very bright future in art and of course we have great museums and cultural institutions.

#### **Maria Finders**

I guess the New Museum will be the new museum on the block. A new structure, a new space that they are going to have, but is there space to grow?

#### **Bob Monk**

In the art world?

#### **Maria Finders**

In New York, how many more museums can be sustained, how many more things can happen on that level?

#### **Bob Monk**

I think because we have so many visitors there is still room for growth. It was like someone was saying earlier in the architecture

panel, about how many people visit the Tate; when I was a young man and I would go to the Metropolitan Museum on a weekend. Literally I could go to any area that I wanted to. If say one of my teachers said I should be looking at medieval armour or something, you would literally have the museum to yourself. Growing up, MoMA was a much smaller institution, you would go in the front door up the stairs, and there were never any people. Today any museum that you go to, practically any day of the week, any hour of the day during opening hours, the museums are packed and so I think like most large cities in the world that are destinations for tourists. I think one of the greatest things of our modern time right now is how people really do appreciate the visual experience of going to an art museum. I think there's plenty of room for other museums. For example, we are all very excited about the new Whitney that will go from a beautiful small historic building which they will retain, and then they will build this incredible building and then when they do exhibitions now, you have this incredible horizontal circulation.

One of the things that Donna and I have talked about for years now, if they had done that renovation uptown it would have been seven stories of these very small floors going up and down and it would have been a mess, but I think, I don't know what new museum MoMA at some point will build, some type of a Kunsthalle, somewhere off site where they will have even larger spaces to do temporary exhibitions and even that when I was saying how scrappy New York is. The curators compete, dealers compete, artists compete, it's a real New York thing. You can work in a more polite city but what gives it a great sense of energy is the fact that there is constant competition.

Everyone is down on MoMA and there are problems with MoMA but at the same time, it's this building that is just filled with treasures. It's just great. When people talk about the challenge, I think New York will go down in history as the great twentieth century city and of course it will have a life and a future. I love living there, I love raising my children there, but it's just an incredible place to walk around, the beauty of it is its twentieth century look, the way Paris has this beautiful nineteenth century

look and I just think again to reiterate I think that it has a really bright future in the art world, I think many, many artists in the world, wherever I travel in the world people tell me, especially young artists, that they want to come to New York so I don't think it's the kind of thing that it is, I mean all those great movements that we all know, they've already happened but nonetheless people still would like to live there and make art while they are in town.

**Maria Finders**

So the city branding really works?

**Bob Monk**

I disagree with that whole thing. I think that word "branding" is like a corporate idea. I think it's all about the function of real cities and I hope Dubai can go to this plain. In New York there is a very natural sort of progression, it was a great place where you know it was one of the original colonies and it has a great history of immigration and then due to tragedies in other parts of the world, all of these great artists emigrated and then became inspirations for people who might have been a little provincial, but then they had these great influences and teachers and you know, I don't know if that's branding. Although I love that thing about JFK/MoMA, I suppose, I don't know I just can't say that word branding.

**Maria Finders**

I would never think of New York only as a brand.

**Bob Monk**

No, I think it's the energy that is quite unbelievable. I wake up every morning and I just feel completely invigorated and when I go to work I love working with artists and I'm very fortunate especially there are three artists that I work very intensively with and that's Ed Ruscha, Richard Artschwager and Ellen Gallagher and then I work with many of the artists in Delhi and you know they live in various places, Ellen Gallagher lives in Rotterdam and Ed Ruscha lives in Los Angeles and Richard lives upstate in New York in Hudson, but the gallery's in New York and the way we support them is through my office and what we're doing in New York City.

**Maria Finders**

Thanks Bob. So let's go to Seoul. We don't know one another Kim Mi, because you've just arrived because you were meant to be on some other panel but tell us a little bit about what you're doing.

**Kim Mi Kyung**

I was on one of the other panels and then there were changes to the program. It is very nice to meet all of you and I have prepared something for a very short presentation for you it will perhaps finish in ten minutes. I would like to give you a joyous welcome to this event; it is my pleasure to introduce the contemporary art of Korea and to you curators and various experts and artists from all over the world. Dubai is considering the position of a culture city and its culture development. All my predictions about how this development can happen are based on the previous experience in my country with contemporary Korean art. At present there are roughly ten public art museums and sixty major privately owned museums and then over two hundred and fifty private galleries (mainly situated in Seoul.) Being recognized by numerous international art forums and other miscellaneous entities for the last ten years has left Korean art to share the similar tram line of other well known but still emerging art scenes. The emerging art of Korea deserves some attention; there is an abundant flow right now of very creative work. I were remembering being very impressed by Lee Chung-woo with humorous and kitsch dressed ladies and the parallels between high and low art.

Here (*Slide*) the image to the left is a traditional landscape but it is very small, smallest Korean characters and Yo Hin, which is like an echo because from the landscape and that we could hear the echoes from the mountain. Another interesting artist here; Ham Jin who is specialized in the microscope art incurring concentration of audience and has delivered on the Korean, optimistic attitude. Meanwhile, I would like to draw your attention to some other Korean artists like Kim Chan Young and, I personally recommend C Jene, one of the Korean treasures of this event who will be interviewed by Arab Times in Kuwait and

will be of course appearing in Gulf Art Fair. She is currently carrying out an exciting experience using porpoises, attempting to stretch the boundaries of what is two dimensional and the painting of objects both by cohesion and the dismembering of traditional medium and imaging. She also works with the various Korean ornaments of a woman. It is possible to separate art in Asia into regional constituencies. A good example of such dividing postures would be Nam June Paik's, "Good Morning Mr Orwell", as you know, very famous video art, made on the first day of 1984.

I think artists belong to a family from different parts of the globe which made them feel the need of sharing their identity with the whole world and I would love to see a collision of opinions which creates about laterally consolidation of art from now on. I hope you guys become the art messengers of something new and exciting about to happen in Dubai.

#### **Maria Finders**

We only have time for a short round of questions: As we were speaking I kept thinking in my mind about Documenta and about the Venice Biennale, about maintenance of global cultural identities and local identities within these kinds of world art cities that kind of happen once in a while. Documenta was a very German view at one point in time where everything was centred around Germany and was presented in a certain way. Now we have the Shanghai Biennale, the Istanbul Biennale and we have the Athens Biennale coming up. What kind of "new world art cities" or should I say world art events do we need to bring all these cities together in a way that they can maintain their identity? Do we still need this idea of country pavilions? Do we still need to have a German focus on the rest of the art world or an Italian focus on the rest of the art world? What do you think William, what's out there for the next years in these big, big events?

#### **William Wells**

Firstly, just because of what's going on in the region at the moment, I object strongly to this kind of labelling and because

it is something that we run across on a daily basis sitting in Cairo. There are always curators, researchers, critics and other galleries and they are coming to us on a constant basis saying that they would like to have a show of Egyptian artists and that they want to put it in an Egyptian pavilion, showing Middle Eastern artists Islamic artists. As far as I'm concerned I would prefer to get rid of all of this right now because it's actually damaging the artists' ability to move forward onto a platform where they are just seen basically as producers and people who are the same as everybody else.

#### **Lance Fung**

While we were talking at lunch, because the other project I'm working on is SITE Santa Fe Biennial and it's the only international Biennial right now, and I'm working with these two guys along with eighteen other curators to develop this project. I want to do an international Biennial of course but I don't want it to have a sort of regional appeal. It's the same thing when we look at Chinese artists and always try to see what is "Chinese" in their work. Will it have a red star or Mao in it, and that's what you'll see in 798. Or I can go out and find an Indian artist that looks Indian or an American because it will have a lot of sequins on it, that's not the point of national or global or whatever art.

At the same token, I don't want a show where it's just the same old work by Doug Aitken or someone, who I like, but what are you trying to say in a Biennial context, let alone an international one. So we had a long conversation of working with the Town House and working and selecting an artist whose passionate, and is aware of their situation which can be so extreme that I can't even wrap my brain around it. But also how this situation influences his or her ability to make work. Beijing has another kind of extremity and that represents, without sounding too "new agey", an energy or a philosophy. I said I don't care if Chinese artists make great video work, or if they are great painters or photographers. I don't care at all about the product; it's really about coming back to the core. They were talking about branding cities which is all crap in my opinion. How are they branded? They are branded by artists not by institutions,

not by museum directors or famous curators. I think of Korea, and that there would not be a Korean movement had it not been for Nam June Paik.

I have worked with many artists since the late '80s; look at all the different New York schools or Paris, you think of every major cultural capital for how long they have lasted. It came from an artist, not an institution and not even a curator. There are major curators who have made major contributions, but it comes down to the creative process. And money is a great tool and it can also kill that creative process, so can the institution, so can be the rapid pace of getting it out there quickly.

I didn't answer your question I just went on a tirade, which I always do, but how do you do that international thing? The biggest thing in the art world is asking the questions not providing the answers; I don't think anyone here can provide the answers. We can also tell you what not to do here in Dubai, and it's probably what Abu Dhabi is doing anyway.

#### Jerome Sans

I have a lot of artist friends who are often asked where they were born; apparently it's really boring to say you were born in Johannesburg or in Korea. I know some Korean artists who have moved to Berlin, to New York or Paris and they do not want to be Korean artists anymore. They are just artists and I'm just a curator I don't care about this. Of course my accent indicates my origins, but beside this I have worked for the last twenty-five years mostly 99% outside my country. I don't feel French anymore. I have everything in the world, international artist for the last twenty years and we are talking about culture now. What is going on? What shall we do together? What shall we invent? With these fantastic Americans, French, Germans, British artists all very proud of themselves, but you have nobody for Africa and other developing countries. The reality is that it's a race between embassies where every nationality has the same possibilities.

It's a real international problem. A few years ago, I was a curator not of the French pavilion but of the Danish pavilion in Venice and we made a project with an American artist Jason Rhodes. We

were making fun of this tragedy out of the Formula 1 thing with a lot of smelly things inside, like going to a race track with French fries. There was this popcorn and all these crazy things, and who's going to be the winner and there is no winner. There are also no losers and this is the real problem of this Biennale thing. In the end we could not do the pavilion because of political reasons by Bush, who had a lot of power. They were very sad at the time, but we couldn't do anything all together to change the rules and to make it an equal platform for the world and not just for some countries where always pleading with the same possibilities. In Kassel I wonder who invented this exhibition, where a curator has five years to make one show. Congratulations, I'm very impressed, fantastic, I'm really happy for the curator, but it's very sad if you look at the history of this exhibition, what happened to all these curators afterwards, it is a tragedy.

#### Maria Finders

The curse of the Documenta?

#### Jerome Sans

Where are they now? Where are they playing, it is sad that they were heroes for five years and then afterwards they retired.

#### Maria Finders

Some are even dead actually.

#### Jerome Sans

But the "Operation Kassel" ... this was the first time in my little history where no one talks about Documenta at all. This is the first time no one seems interested in who is it or what the story is about. The only thing I've heard is about a Spanish chef and the cherries on the cake. My colleagues have not heard anything either,, so maybe this is interesting, that no one has ever heard about the curator or the artists in this project and but only the chance perhaps to eat some good food for once in Germany.

#### Maria Finders

Yes, absolutely.

I don't know, I had a very strange discussion with Jose Ignacio Roco who was doing the São Paulo Biennale and they disbanded

all the country pavilions. Well, they tried. They still had country zones, but the two points he raised was the economic point that means if there are no country pavilions, the countries won't pay anything, which is bad news for everybody. So then you get into the private sponsor groove, which everyone knows probably why Roger is not announcing who the artist is because he doesn't know how much money he is going to have next week. So this is a reality and the second reality was that when we were doing this debate with Jose, this Peruvian woman stood up and said if there weren't any country pavilions in the São Paulo Biennale, I would never have shown there because no one knows any Peruvian artists and they would never just come and find me. So there is that, of course, obvious lack of taste that happens and it's completely ridiculous to think who lives in which country now. I always think about what's a better system, what's a more democratic system. Someone, Matthew Slotover, says the only democratic system is art shows, trade shows.

Okay I'm being provocative.

Thanks to all for this great conversation.

Savita Apte

## Art city Mumbai

Savita Apte, Curator and Head of Education, Gulf Art Fair could not attend the panel on Art Cities to present the city of Mumbai. This is her paper on the topic that we are very grateful to include in this publication.

Savita Apte

**Mumbai is an amoeba of a city – incessantly growing, stretching itself in various directions and voraciously imbibing and assimilating multiple influences without losing its essential Mumbainess.**

This Mumbainess has evolved over the last two centuries; a polyglot cosmopolitan culture predicated on the foundations of the cotton industry, the port, the banking and insurance industries, the international architectural styles, the advertising industry and the film industry. From the start it was the film and advertising industries that capitalised on the non-essentialising of high and low art. In India the lines between high and low art have been



traditionally blurred and this has predated post-modernist theorisation.

As courtly patronage and traditional modes of art education waned during colonial rule, metropolitan schools of art were established and urban centres of art production developed. Through the establishment of art societies and exhibition spaces, and the concomitant rise of art mediators, an art network was evolved and an urban collector base developed. Prolific urban art activity ensued, which graduated from a pronounced focus on national identity to absorption with personal identity. These highly personalised art practices required greater mediation, more contextualisation and enhanced exhibition facilities.

Whereas most regional capitals in India maintain homogeneity, Mumbai has from the very beginning embraced its heterogeneous population and concomitant multivalent culture. It is a city where several vernacular calendars of culture have coexisted providing a rich iconographic thesaurus for its resident artists. Of late, as Mumbai aspires towards global economic homogenisation, there has been a tendency to follow a trajectory of intellectual homogenisation. Art history, which had once been implicit in the nation building exercise, has now become an agent of globalisation – constantly harnessing global issues, themes and approaches. Mumbai, in the twenty-first century is now the locus of this globalising tendency as well as the centre of local resistance. Its artists produce vital art forms that speak an international language whilst resonating in the vernacular.

That being said I would like to pose some questions. What makes a city an art city? Is it the presence of museums? Or the number of art galleries? Or is it the presence of an established network of art producers and consumers? Is it collectors? Exhibitions? Artists? Art schools? Art societies? Or publications on art? Is it in fact confined to just the visual arts? Surely the presence of a deep rooted and active music, dance and theatre industry as well as multilingual literary projects add to Mumbai's cultural capital.

Mumbai boasts an old and prestigious art school, and hundreds of graduates every year join the ranks of practising artists in

Mumbai. In addition, artists from all over India flock to Mumbai in search of representation and patronage in spite of the unaffordable cost of living. Galleries mushroom: almost every month it seems a new gallery opens and for every gallery, a half dozen or more people set themselves up as dealers. Exhibitions abound: from the exclusive curatorial led projects to the more inclusive 'art street' fare. There is a 'space' for everyone. Mediators though not critics thrive and art publications, in print and on the net, proliferate. There is definitely an art network linking art producers and art consumers.

Although they do not often work synergistically, they are united in one thought: Mumbai's artists, gallerists and collectors all decry the lack of a suitable museum for contemporary art and the paucity of public exhibition spaces. This very lack of infrastructure and governmental apathy itself affords opportunities. In their rush to condemn public policy and government practice, artists and architects are missing the opportunity to work in partnership; to deliver truly inspirational temporary structures in order to exhibit tangible examples of Mumbai's art. One thing is certain, artistic intervention is required to transform and regenerate hidden or overlooked urban space. Or perhaps, in a country which prides itself on its IT industry, the way forward is to have a constellation of 'virtual museums'.

If being an art city depends on having a physical museum then no, Mumbai is not at the moment an art city. However, if being an art city is dependent on the interaction of the local population with the art being produced then yes indeed, Mumbai qualifies as an art city and has been one for many decades. Rather than be exiled behind walls, Mumbai's art is part of Mumbai's people: indeed the very movement of the teeming millions of Mumbaikars is an art form in itself. Mumbai represents the unity in diversity of India better than any other city in the sub continent: in tune with the country's history, memory, festivals, scandals, taboos, spirituality, it sets the pace for India's visual culture. Mumbai is truly an art city as it is here in Mumbai that globally aware art is being produced which at the same time is grounded in local history and culture.

Which begs the question is it only when what is being produced on the local level reaches global attention that a city becomes an art city? Then who decides whether Mumbai is an art city? Mumbaikars – the citizens of Mumbai, the rest of their countrymen, or curators from the west, newly engaging with Indian art? The decision I think rests with Mumbaikars. The answer in my mind is unequivocal – Mumbai is without doubt a 21st century art city.

## Epilogue

In April 2007, Hans Ulrich Obrist conducted the following interview with videomaker, thinker and writer Jalal Toufic, who could not attend the 1st Global Art Forum due to an irresolvable visa problem that we apologise for. As it pertains to the nature of the interview as an art beyond conversation, we present this thought-provoking encounter as an epilogue to the first edition of the Global Art Forum publication series and sincerely thank Hans Ulrich and Jalal.

### Hans Ulrich Obrist

First about interviews. You write in the postscript of one of your rare, untimely interviews: “While I am reluctant to give and conduct interviews (this is the second one I give; in addition I have myself once interviewed a filmmaker), the people I am essentially interested in interviewing are Sûfi masters who have already died physically, as well as al-Khadir, whose encounter with Moses in Qur’ân 18:65-82 is one of the most beautiful interviews”—you seem to overlook here your interview with a schizophrenic in your video *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*.

### Jalal Toufic

I treat the interviews I do as part of my oeuvre. That’s why I demand that I be provided with the questions in writing. Indeed, toward the end of a phone interview I recently did for the position of Chairperson of the Art Department at Cornell University, I suddenly felt that I was being uncharacteristically sloppy not to have asked, even for this kind of interview, that I be provided in advance with the questions. Since I treat the interviews I do as part of my oeuvre, I should have included in the enumeration to which you refer interviews in my videos; in addition to my interview with a schizophrenic in *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green*, I have also interviewed filmmaker Ghassan Salhab on the subject of insomnia in my 15-minute video *Phantom Beirut: A Tribute to Ghassan Salhab* (2002).<sup>2</sup> I am basically interested in interviews that are apropos/apposite formally or at the level of the medium. Here are some examples of such interviews:

- The interview in which it is revealed that, at a very basic level, we are frequently if not constantly being interviewed. Here’s two examples where the interview is insidiously interfered with by a subterranean coercive interview of the interviewee by the obtrusive (diegetic) voices(-over):<sup>3</sup> my interview with a schizophrenic in my *Credits Included: A Video in Red and Green* (1995), and Antonin Artaud’s radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*.<sup>4</sup>
- The interview in which the interviewee answers only by quoting the interviewer, as in Narcissus’ interview with the nymph Echo, who, as a punishment for distracting Hera, Zeus’ wife, with stories while the god’s concubines managed to escape, could only repeat what has just been said, not initiate an utterance. At one point during one of his walks, feeling unsure of where he was, Narcissus inquired: “Is anyone here?” Echo: “Here.” Looking around, but not seeing anyone, he asked again: “Why do you avoid me?” Echo: “Why do you avoid me?” She rushed toward him, but he extricated himself from her embrace, saying: “I will die before you ever lie with me!” Echo: “Lie with me!”<sup>5</sup> In this interview “the sender... receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form” (Lacan). My own contribution to this interview, which proclaims what remains *sous-entendu* in the Greek original, underscoring the resounding pertinence of having Echo as an attendant of a mortal encountering his body’s reflection, is the following: “During another of his solitary walks, he sensed her presence. He resolved not to utter any words so as not to give her the opportunity to have a conversation and an interaction with him. He soon came upon a spring. As he looked into its limpid water, he saw his image, facing him. Somehow, he felt that such a thing did not go without saying. And indeed he heard right then a voice say: ‘Narcissus!’ Deeply entranced by what he was seeing in the spring’s water, Narcissus did not even instinctively turn away from the image to look in the direction from which Echo’s sudden utterance came. But when the word ‘Narcissus’ was repeated, he became aware that these two calls were Echo’s. But if Echo could only repeat, never initiate, then that first call he heard must be a repetition of some initial

utterance of his name. Who could have been the addresser of that initial interpellation? He came to the realization that he himself must have said it (this voiceless interpellation of oneself is virtually the beginning of the interior monologue), that the circumstance that his image in the water was facing him was the result of a successful interpellation.”<sup>6</sup>

- The interview where the interviewee answers only by quoting others, which is virtually the case in my “A Curt Inspired Interview around a Short Video and a Long One” in my book *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You*.
- The interview in which “the sender... receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form” (Lacan, “Seminar on [Poe’s] ‘The Purloined Letter’”): the encounter of Moses and al-Khadir as reported in the Qur’ân provides a felicitous example of such an interview. Ibn ‘Arabî: “The shadow of a person appeared to me.... I rose from my bed and headed towards him... I stared at him and recognized Abû ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sulamî, whose spirit had incarnated and whom God had sent to me out of mercy for me. ‘... If he [Moses] had been patient, he would have seen. As it happened, he was preparing to ask al-Khadir a million questions. All concerned facts that had happened to him and that he reproved when coming from al-Khadir.”<sup>7</sup> As Michel Chodkiewicz observes, “The three acts that Moses reproaches al-Khadir, the boring of a hole in the ship, the slaying of the lad, and the failure to demand payment in exchange of a service, correspond to three episodes of the life of Moses that do not conform externally to the norm: the crossing of the Red Sea, the slaying of an Egyptian and the watering of the herd of the girls of Shu‘ayb (Jethro). Therefore al-Khadir does nothing but return to Moses his own image, but Moses judges al-Khadir and therefore himself according to his own state, which is the introduction of the law.”<sup>8</sup>
- The interview that reaches back to what it is etymologically: French *entrevue*, from Old French, from feminine past participle of *entrevoir*, *to see: entre-*, *between* (from Latin *inter-*) + *voir*, *to see*.<sup>9</sup> Here’s two examples. In Wenders’ *Until the End of the*

*World*, a scientist designs a camera that allows a blind person to see a simulation of a referential image on the condition that the latter be concurrently remembered by, seen in the mind’s eye of the one who recorded it for the camera, i.e. only if the blind person participates in an interview. And in Bergman’s *Persona*, the close-ups result in an interview, with what was prior to the close-ups half the face of Alma and the complementary half of the face of Elizabeth joining in a defaced face that sees nothing.

- The interview in which the interviewer recognizes fully that he or she comes after the interviewee, and asks his or her questions from within the universe constructed by the latter, for example John Corbett’s interview with John Cage, “The Conversation Game,” in which he tried to “construct an interview that was conceptually consistent with Cage. Inspired by a concert he and Marcel Duchamp had given in Toronto in 1968, in which acoustic signals were produced by the individual moves of a game of chess, I chose to make the interview into a game in which the questions would be selected by chance operations.”<sup>10</sup> We can re-title Corbett’s interview: “After John Cage: The Conversation Game.”

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

I am curious to know more about your dialogue with Walid Raad and eventual collaborations with other artists.

**Jalal Toufic**

The exemplary case of a collaboration with an artist is that it be both a timely and an untimely one. I believe that this is the case of my collaboration with Walid Raad, with whom I have collaborated in a timely, conscious, exoteric manner, in my video *Credits Included* (1995), in which he acts; as colleagues at the Arab Image Foundation, before I resigned from this institution; and in the seminar “The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster” we co-taught at unitednationsplaza in Berlin in 2007; but also in an untimely manner, unbeknownst to us, I through my concept of radical closure with irruption of unworldly ahistorical fully-formed entities, and Raad through the video *Hostage: the Bachar Tapes (English Version)*, 2000, produced by him and whose

purported director is the hostage Bachar Souheil notwithstanding that historically there was no hostage by that name; as well as the Kahlil Gibran “document” that was projected as a slide and around which Raad’s talk “Miraculous Beginnings” at Musée Sursock, Beirut, revolved,<sup>11</sup> etc., both of which can be legitimately viewed as unworldly a-historical irruptions in the radical closure that Beirut may have become at one point. I have collaborated with Raad neither in a timely manner nor in an untimely manner in his 20-year photographic project of Beirut titled *Sweet Talk*, which remains occulted and which possibly instances a withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster—for artworks, films, videos, literary works, and theoretical works to function as symptoms of a culture, it is best that they would not have collaborated in an untimely manner with each other.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

**How do your videos relate to your literary works?**

**Is there a connection?**

**Jalal Toufic**

My texts and videos do not try to accomplish the same thing, but complement each other. In my books I am interested in discontinuity both in form (my book *Distracted* is formally aphoristic) and content (for instance I have written on the affinity between the atomists of Islam, for example al-Ash‘arī, and cinema, where the appearance of motion results from the projection of film stills at a rate of 24 frames per second [in the silent era the rate of projection was often 18 frames per second]). But in my videos, I mainly work with (Bergsonian) duration (for instance the twenty-minute-long shot of the car drive in ‘*Āshūrā*’: *This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, the ten-minute-long shot of the slaughter of two sheep and of the second cow in *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, and the twelve-minute-long shot of my nephew sleeping in *A Special Effect Termed “Time”; or, Filming Death at Work*) and would like to achieve the basic continuity of a Taoist calligrapher or painter, i.e. have the *chi* (vital breath/original energy) not interrupted even when there are, exceptionally, cuts, for example between different scenes. Moreover, while I am an aphoristic writer, I am not a film/video maker of short films/videos, i.e., one who, like Artavazd Peleshian

(*The Seasons*, 29 minutes), Brothers Quay (*Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies*, 14 minutes), Kubelka, Jan Svankmajer (*Dimensions of Dialogue*, 12 minutes) can, to paraphrase Nietzsche, show in ten minutes what everyone shows in a feature-length film or video—what everyone *does not* show in a feature-length film or video; generally, the longer my video, the more substantial it is. With the exception of my book (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, where it was a matter of dispersing the universe since it was turning into a paranoid one, in my other books I am trying to build a universe, and thus feel affined to Paul Klee’s “Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible” (“Creative Credo,” *The Thinking Eye*). The moment one succeeds in building a universe, it detaches from this world, somewhat like the baby universes of cosmology. But in my video works, I do not have the impulse and aim to produce autonomous works, to try to create a universe, but want my videos to be, as Deleuze wrote, “reasons to believe in *this* world.” While I have tended to be concerned with the creation of aesthetic facts in my books, I have not tried to do the same in my essayistic documentary videos—notwithstanding that the creation of aesthetic facts can happen in both fiction films and documentary films—but tried rather to document certain worldly facts while making sure to subtract all that is customarily added to make the viewer see only certain parts of the referential image, i.e. all that is added in order to subtract from the image, for example the voice-over (I also try to avoid non-diegetic special effects [speeded motion, etc.] and music partly because they imply that reality is not intense enough on its own). With the rapid advances in digital simulation and virtual reality, when we encounter reality—in the sense of the actual as opposed to simulations—at all, it will increasingly strike us as the Lacanian Real.

Given the rarity of contemporary thinking regarding film and video (Michel Chion [*The Voice in Cinema*...], Slavoj Žižek [*Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture; Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*...], as well as the occasional essay by or interview with Jacques Rancière, Raul Ruiz, and a few others—some of whom I am sure exist but are still unknown to me),<sup>12</sup> I have offered in my books several examples



“of what I regard as ‘exegesis’” (Nietzsche)—a video is prefixed in the tele-mode, at a distance, to an essay, which is in part an exegetical explication [Latin *explicatus*, past participle of *explicare*, literally, to unfold, from *ex-* + *plicare* to fold] of it. Thus “Credits Included” in my book *Over-Sensitivity* (1996) is an exegetical explication of my video *Credits Included*; “Saving Face” and “Something I’m Dying to Tell You, Lyn” in my book *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (2005) are exegetical explications of my videos *Saving Face* (2003) and *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002) respectively; and “‘Âshûrâ’: or, Torturous Memory as a Condition of Possibility of an Unconditional Promise” in my book ‘Âshûrâ’: *This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005) is an exegetical explication of my video *Âshûrâ’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002).

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

**What are your unrealized films and other projects?**

**Jalal Toufic**

I am in the process of finishing writing a “script,” *Jouissance in Post-War Beirut*, for a vampire film that I will co-direct with videomaker Roy Samaha, initially one of my undergraduate students, then one of my graduate ones. Some of my future conceptual film posters will be for scripts that never reached the production stage, that remained unfiled, for example Tarkovsky’s *Light Wind (Ariel)*, *Hoffmanniana*, and *Sardor*, as well as Shâdî ‘Abd al-Salâm’s *Akhenaten*... I envision the protagonist in my coming collaborative vampire film seeing in a movie theater the aforementioned poster for Tarkovsky’s *Sardor* hung on the wall along with other posters of famous films, for example Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and Angelopoulos’ *Eternity and a Day*.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

**Can you tell me about your show *Minor Art: Conceptual Film and Video Posters*?**

**Jalal Toufic**

*Minor Art: Conceptual Film and Video Posters*, presently re-titled *Minor Art: Conceptual Posters and Book Covers*, is a work in progress began in 2000. The title draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s

book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. In his “One Manifesto Less,” Deleuze writes: “With regard to his play *Romeo and Juliet*, Carmelo Bene says: ‘It is a critical essay on Shakespeare.’ But the fact is that CB is not writing on Shakespeare; his critical essay is itself a piece of theatre.” I would also say, of my conceptual posters and book covers: they are critical essays on certain films (Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Angelopoulos’ *Eternity and a Day*, etc.), videos and books—except that these critical essays are themselves artworks.

In an era when, anachronistically, some publishers continue to take years to print a manuscript they have already accepted for publication, I hope to encounter more frequently cases where the delay in months and possibly years is not due to financial difficulties, but is caused by the failure of the thorough publisher to find someone who is able to come up with a felicitous conceptual cover for the book. Indeed, I can imagine a publisher or author doing a second edition of a book “simply” in order to provide it with an appropriate conceptual cover, when the first cover was merely a decorative one. Let us design great conceptual covers for books; let us make it possible to have love from first sight regarding books; let us work so that a book can be *read from cover to cover*; let us prove wrong the saying: *you can’t judge a book by its cover*.<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche writes in the preface of *On the Genealogy of Morals*: “I have offered in the third essay of the present book an example of what I regard as ‘exegesis’ in such a case—an aphorism is prefixed to this essay, the essay itself is a commentary on it.” The third essay is the exegesis of “Unconcerned, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants us; she is a woman and always loves only a warrior” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). Similarly, I consider the section *Rear Window Vertigo* in my book *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* an exegetical explication/unfolding of the four conceptual posters titled *Rear Window Vertigo* that accompany the essay, and that each is a picture worth a thousand words. To say in a book cover “what everyone says in a book—what everyone does not say in a book”! (certainly I do not include Nietzsche in this *everyone* of common sense. Regrettably, one cannot judge any of the available English

translations of Nietzsche's books by its cover). Regarding books, I much prefer a conceptual book cover to a foreword, prolegomenon, prologue, preface or postscript (I recently wrote a foreword for the third edition of Etel Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse*; is it in lieu of a conceptual cover for that book? Will I one day do a conceptual cover for it?). And regarding films, I much prefer conceptual film posters, as preambles, to previews of the film. Indeed, I consider (conceptual) film posters to be far more a part of the film than any non-diegetic music or voice-over it may include—certainly a felicitous conceptual film poster is worth a thousand words of non-diegetic voice-over. Deplorably, design for posters is usually used as sloppily and cheaply as non-diegetic music or voice-over in film. I do not use non-diegetic music in my videos and I try to create only conceptual posters for my videos and only conceptual covers for my books. Bresson asked: "What do I start from? From the subject to be expressed? From sensation? Do I start twice?"<sup>14</sup> Let us create inspiring conceptual film posters so that an increasing number of filmmakers would answer the same two questions thus: "I start from a (conceptual) film poster." Yes, let us create conceptual film posters that beget films (along the lines of Vertov's *films that beget films*).

The mixed-media work that was my contribution to the exhibition *Memorial to the Iraq War* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London was a response to the following report in *The Economist* issue of 5 March 1998: "The full extent of his country's isolation was brought home to an Iraqi graduate student, Muhammad Darwish, when he wrote to the British Library, enclosing some of its own pre-paid coupons, and asking it to post him some photocopied material on semiotics. Back came the answer that his request could not be processed because of the trade sanctions imposed on Iraq by our government. For Mr Darwish and other Iraqi intellectuals, who are fond of the adage, *Cairo writes, Beirut publishes and Baghdad reads*, this cultural isolation, the inability to get new books, is one of the most galling aspects of their country's status as an untouchable...." My proposal for the installation was: "The 38 books listed in the British Library's catalogue under the subject of dual-use are to be

checked out by the ICA for inclusion in the installation *The Dual-Use Memorial* that will be part of the exhibition *Memorial to the Iraq War* at ICA, London. With the exception of four of them, which will be mailed to Iraq prior to the opening of the exhibition, the remaining books will be placed in glass compartments along with the British Library printouts of the online book requests indicating that they have been checked out. For the duration of the exhibition (23 May to 27 June 2007), the books will be mailed at the rate of one a day to designated libraries in Iraq. Every time one of the books is mailed to Iraq, the related receipt from the post office (which indicates the library to which it is being sent) will replace it. By the end of the exhibition all 38 books would have been mailed to Iraq. In a corner, titled *Packing My Library*, the following three books are to be placed over sundry articles of clothing in a suitcase: Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* (which includes "Plato's Pharmacy") (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981); *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume XI (1910) (which includes "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words"); and a compendium of Arabic words with antithetical meanings, Muhammad b. al-Qâsim al-Anbârî's *Kitâb al-Addâd*. In another corner, a monitor plays a looped excerpt from the scene in Hitchcock's *Marnie* in which the hysterical eponymous protagonist reacts anxiously, as if it were blood, to the drop of red ink that falls on her sleeve. On top of the monitor is a copy of the first volume of Edward William Lane's translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*—one of the great books of dual use—which includes "The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban." Due to funding limitations, the ICA borrowed only nine of these books from the British Library, and before the opening of the exhibition two were sent to the libraries of the two universities I had nominated: the University of Baghdad, and the University of Technology in Baghdad. A day after the opening of the exhibition, the British Library learnt of the work through a report in the BBC and demanded the prompt return of the seven books remaining at the ICA. I and the ICA conceded to this demand. But I asked ICA to take a life-size photograph of the shelf with the seven remaining books as well as the two receipts from the post office. The life-size photograph was then placed on the

wall above the shelf from which the books had been removed, with the two receipts in the life-size photograph perfectly aligned with the two actual post office receipts. The following two occasional subtitles for *The Dual-Use Memorial* were then placed, as labels, next to the life-size photograph of the shelf with the books and receipts: *The British Library's Way of Making Us Judge a Book by Its Cover: One-Dimensional, One-Sided* (cf. *My Conceptual Book Covers for a Different, Felicitous Manner of Judging a Book by Its Cover*), aka *After Joseph Kosuth's "One and Three Chairs"* (1965).

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

You mentioned that Edward Said did not interest you.

Have there been Middle Eastern pioneers you learnt from?

**Jalal Toufic**

My disinterest in Edward Said extends to almost all those Arabs in whom he—so shrewd at championing mainstream Arab cultural figures who *already* wielded significant influence over or actual institutional power in various cultural industries of the Middle East—was interested: for example filmmaker Youssef Chahine, Naguib Mahfouz, who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for literature, so-called Adonis, Mahmoud Darwish... The latter opines about poetry and about fame to an Israeli journalist in Godard's *Our Music*: "Do you know why we Palestinians are famous? Because you are our enemy... We have the misfortune of having Israel as an enemy, because it has countless allies in the world; and we have the good fortune of having Israel as an enemy, because Jews are the center of interest of the world. That's why you have brought us defeat but you have given us fame"—taking into consideration the warning of the poet Rilke, "Fame is finally only the sum total of all the misunderstandings that can gather around a new name," the basic misunderstanding fashioned by fame in the case of Mahmoud Darwish, as well as that other "most famous contemporary Arab poet," self-proclaimed Adonis (how much hubris there is in assuming this pen name by one who is *human, all-too-human* and who has not died before dying!), is to be mistaken for a poet—indeed Elias Sanbar misplaced his French translation of Darwish in a poetry book series, *Poésie*/Gallimard, which includes such books as Antonin Artaud's *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (followed by *Le Théâtre de la cruauté*); Ghérasim

Luca's *Héros-limite* followed by *Le Chant de la carpe* and *Paralipomènes*; Henri Michaux's *Connaissance par les gouffres* and *L'infini turbulent*; Rainer Maria Rilke's *Élégies de Duino, Sonnets à Orphée* and *autres poèmes*; and Walt Whitman's *Feuilles d'herbe*!

I have learned from and continue to be grateful to the Iranian Henry Corbin (I would like to think that he was an Iranian in a previous life or else that while he was born in France on Earth, he was born in Iran, his spiritual country, in 'alam al-mithâl, the Archetypal World).

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

What are your visions for the Emirates—where until now there are auctions and art fairs but no new schools and knowledge production.

**Jalal Toufic**

Stephen S. Roach, the Managing Director and Chief Economist of Morgan Stanley, wrote on 23 February 2007: "It has been almost three weeks since I returned from my latest trip to the Middle East, but I am still haunted by the sight of the cranes of Dubai. According to construction trade sources, somewhere between 15% to 25% of the 125,000 construction cranes currently operating in the world today are located in Dubai... The comparison with Shanghai Pudong — China's massive urban development project of the 1990s — is unavoidable. I saw Pudong rise from the rice fields and never thought anything could surpass it. I was wrong. Based on industry sources, 26.8 million square feet of office space is expected to come on line in Dubai in 2007, alone — ... nearly equal to the total stock of 30 million square feet of office space in downtown Minneapolis. Based on current projections, another 42 million square feet should come on line in Dubai in 2008 — the equivalent of adding the office space of a downtown San Francisco." And yet how mundane is Dubai, how still poor in universes is this emirate and the country to which it belongs. All these cranes and the buildings they are being used to construct are part of this world, but in Minneapolis and even more so in San Francisco are some great writers, poets and filmmakers who are building extra *universes* that, as Philip K. Dick puts it, don't fall apart two days later.

<sup>1</sup>Some titles ought not be given to one book or one film or one painting. My *Irruptions of the Real* is such a title: indeed, it is the title of a trilogy of my short videos: *The Sleep of Reason: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2002), *Saving Face* (2003), and *Phantom Beirut: A Tribute to Ghassan Salhab* (2002). *Phantom Beirut* is another such title; it should be either the explicit title if not of the collected works of a writer or filmmaker or painter, then at least of a diptych or triptych or trilogy; or the title of an anthology or film or video program of works by various authors, filmmakers, or videomakers (one of the special issues that I edited for the American journal *Discourse* has such a title: *Mortals to Death*); or the esoteric title that functions as the strange attractor of a fragmentary and/or dispersive and/or occulted book or film/video composed by a virtual montage of sections from several books or shots and scenes from several films or videos. To give the title *Phantom Beirut* to a single book or film is to either act presumptuously, or else usurp the esoteric title of the occulted or dispersed book or film/video of another video/film maker or writer—Jalal Toufic? Anyway, *Zomboid Beirut* would be a more fitting title for Salhab's first feature film as well as his most recent, 2006 feature film, for which he misappropriated the Blanchot title *The Last Man*. What applies to *Phantom Beirut* applies also to my titles *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* and *Forthcoming*: for example, the latter, messianic title applies to at least two of my books, the book thus titled explicitly and published in 2000 and 'Āshūrā': *This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), as well as to my three videos around the Twelver Shi'ite event 'Āshūrā': 'Āshūrā': *This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (80 minutes, 2002), *The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day* (60 minutes, 2005), and *Lebanese Performance Art; Circle: Ecstatic; Class: Marginalized; Excerpt 3* (5 minutes, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>If I paid a tribute to Ghassan Salhab in the subtitle of one of my 2002-videos, it was for his short video *La rose de personne* (a title appropriated from Celan's fourth volume of poetry), 2000, in which various shots of moving cars and walking people in Hamra street in Beirut are superimposed on a shot from a car driving from one end to the other of the same street. Would I renew my tribute in 2007? Yes, but strictly for another superimposition, which

happens toward the end of his video *Posthumous*, 2007: over a frozen image of a man on a motorcycle near blocks of concrete obstructing one of the roads of the southern suburb of Beirut in the aftermath of the most recent Israeli war on Lebanon, in which the bridges in that suburb (as well in many other areas in Lebanon) were extensively damaged, a moving shot from a car advancing on an open road is superimposed; through this superimposition, Salhab allows that frozen motorcycle as well as any potential cars moving in the direction of those concrete blocks to nonetheless proceed past the latter. Reconstruction has to happen materially but also artistically—how easy it is to remove these physical obstructions compared to doing it artistically—Salhab has contributed as a videomaker to the reconstruction of Beirut's southern suburb. Oh, if only he would work on creating the universe that has an affinity with and makes possible these superimpositions rather than meddling, often spuriously, pretentiously and derivatively, in many other, incongruous matters.

<sup>3</sup>How different are these two uncanny interviews from Ghassan Salhab's embarrassing *A Brief Encounter with Jean Luc Godard*, a video that uses extracts from Godard's *Our Music* in which the latter discourses on the shot and reverse shot, then shows two stills—one of a man and the other of a woman—from a Hawks film, then asserts that they are actually the *same thing twice*, i.e. ostensibly not a shot-reverse shot, because the director was incapable of seeing the difference between a man and a woman—withstanding Godard's simplistic generalization, failing to see the difference between two women as a result of following thoroughly the suggestive logic of the close-up (Deleuze: "Ordinarily, three roles of the face are recognizable: it is individuating [it distinguishes or characterizes each person]; it is socializing [it manifests a social role]; it is relational or communicating [it ensures not only communication between two people, but also, in a single person, the internal agreement between his character and his role]. Now the face, which effectively presents these aspects in the cinema as elsewhere, loses all three in the case of close-up.... The facial close-up is both the face and its effacement" [*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, pp. 101-102]) is the occasion for one of the greatest shot-reverse shot scenes

in the history of cinema: the scene in Bergman's *Persona* in which Alma's removal of a snapshot of Elizabeth's son from under his mother's hand and her narration to the latter regarding her relation to her son is shown twice, once with the camera on Elizabeth, a second time with the camera on Alma (while it is a standard procedure when filming angle/reverse angle scenes to shoot with the camera first on one actor, then on the other, then to intercut the two set-ups, here the two takes, from opposite angles, are not intercut but added), so we get "the same thing twice"—on the way to getting the same nothing twice in a close-up composed of what was prior to this series of close-ups half the face of Alma and the complementary half of the face of Elizabeth. Did Salhab achieve a reverse shot to the shot of Godard indulging in a monologue during which he repeatedly interrupts the ineffectual interjections of the videomaker qua interviewer, who remains off-screen, his questions barely audible? No; for that a different video is required, one that does not consist of the "same thing twice": the form and mannerisms, such as the recurrent black screen, the intertitles, which are mostly quotes from Godard's films, for example *Histoire(s) du cinéma* ("The Cinema Alone," "Alone" [Godard in this video?], "The Cinema"), of *A Brief Encounter with Jean Luc Godard* are Godardian. The video's coda, following the credits and a black screen, in which Salhab asks off-screen, "So you don't like dialogue?", only to get for answer, "Dialogue? Only Socrates loved dialogue. He was asked to poison himself, because of that, by dint of poisoning people...", reminded me of this aphorism from E.M. Cioran's *Anathemas and Admirations*, "The essential often appears at the end of a long conversation. The great truths are spoken on the doorstep"—except that the "truth" of this "interview" is definitely not a great one. An attentive spectator who had watched Godard's *Meetin' WA*, 1986 (in which Godard interviews Woody Allen), and *2 x 50 Years of French Cinema*, 1995 (in parts of which Godard interviews Michel Piccoli), where it is flagrant how little Godard listens to others, prior to watching his *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, 1980, would be wary of considering the repeated reference of some of the latter film's secondary characters to a music that they hear but that remains inaudible to the protagonist as a diegetic music that can be accessed only telepathically, in the over

mode—indeed in the final scene of the film, as the protagonist ends up hearing this music while lying on the ground after being hit by a car, it is revealed by a camera pan that the music is issuing from a mundane orchestra nearby.

<sup>4</sup>The original broadcast of Artaud's radio play was cancelled by Wladimir Porché, the director of the French Radio, the day before its scheduled airing on 2 February 1948. To hear the work, go to: [http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/artaud\\_antonin/judgement/Artaud-Antonin\\_09\\_Conclusion.mp3](http://ubu.wfmu.org/sound/artaud_antonin/judgement/Artaud-Antonin_09_Conclusion.mp3)

<sup>5</sup>Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 1 (Penguin, 1960), pp. 286-287.

<sup>6</sup>Jalal Toufic, *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000), p. 180.

<sup>7</sup>Ibn 'Arabi, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), pp. 157-158.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 311 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup>*American Heritage Dictionary, Fourth Edition*, 2002.

<sup>10</sup>John Corbett, *Extended Play: Sounding off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 181-191.

<sup>11</sup>Walid Ra'd, "Bid'āyat 'ajā'ibiyā—miswadda (Miraculous Beginnings—A Draft)," trans. Tūnī Shakar, *Al-Ādāb*, January-February 2001, Beirut, Lebanon, pp. 64-67. The document in question appears on page 65.

<sup>12</sup>Since rarity is not inexistence, and setting aside here the difference between criticism and thought (see pp. 33-42 of the second edition of my book *Distraction* on this difference), when Godard asserts in Ghassan Salhab's *A Brief Encounter with Jean Luc Godard*, "Cinema criticism? It's been a long time now since there's been any," he shamelessly reveals his pretentious ignorance—at least in this matter.

<sup>13</sup>Replacing it with: *you can't judge a book by its title*.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, translated from the French by Jonathan Griffin; with an introduction by J.M.G. Le Clézio (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1997), p. 139.





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